TURKMENISTAN AND CENTRAL ASIA AFTER NIYAZOV

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FOREWORD

On December 21, 2006, President Sapirmurat Niyazov, Turkmenistan's all-powerful leader suddenly died. His death led to a succession that was evidently dominated by the secret police whose nominee, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, has established himself as president. Because Central Asia is a cockpit of great power rivalry and a potential theater in the Global War on Terrorism, no sooner had Niyazov died than the great powers were seeking to influence Turkmenistan's future policies away from the neutrality that had been Niyazov's policy. Turkmenistan's importance lies almost exclusively in its large natural gas holdings and proximity to the Caspian Sea and Iran. Because energy is regarded as a strategic asset, Russia, Iran, China, and the United States have been visibly engaged in competition for influence. The outcome of this competition and of the domestic struggle for power will have repercussions throughout Central Asia.

In this monograph, Dr. Stephen Blank shows the linkage between energy and security policies in Central Asia and in the policies of the major powers towards Central Asia. Beyond this analysis, he provides recommendations for U.S. policymakers as to how they should conduct themselves in this complex situation. This monograph continues SSI's focus not just on Central Asia, but on regional security issues in the contemporary world.

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STEPHEN J. BLANK has served as the Strategic Studies Institute's expert on the Soviet bloc and the post-Soviet world since 1989. Prior to that he was Associate Professor of Soviet Studies at the Center for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education, Maxwell Air Force Base, and taught at the University of Texas, San Antonio, and at the University of California, Riverside. Dr. Blank is the editor of *Imperial Decline: Russia's Changing Position in Asia*, coeditor of *Soviet Military and the Future*, and author of *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin's Commissariat of Nationalities, 1917-1924*. He has also written many articles and conference papers on Russian, Commonwealth of Independent States, and Eastern European security issues. Dr. Blank's current research deals with proliferation and the revolution in military affairs, and energy and security in Eurasia. His two most recent books are *Russo-Chinese Energy Relations: Politics in Command*, London: Global Markets Briefing, 2006; and *Natural Allies? Regional Security in Asia and Prospects for Indo-American Strategic Cooperation*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2005. Dr. Blank holds a B.A. in History from the University of Pennsylvania, and a M.A. and Ph.D. in History from the University of Chicago.

SUMMARY

Sapirmurat Niyazov ruled Turkmenistan, a small Central Asian country with enormous natural gas holdings, like a sultan or latter-day Stalin. Therefore his sudden death on December 21, 2006, opened the way not just to a domestic power struggle, but also to fears of instability in Turkmenistan and Central Asia, and to a major international struggle among the great powers—Russia, China, Iran, and the United States—for influence over the new leadership.

This monograph examines the dimensions of the succession to Niyazov, the great power struggle for influence in this key Central Asian state, and concludes with recommendations for American policymakers. It examines the ways in which the succession has been arranged and what its likely course is going to be, one of very cautious and moderated reforms from the top. It also takes account of the issue of succession in Central Asian regimes, all of which are despotic and often dominated by families and clans. Turkmenistan may be or serve as a kind of precedent of what we should soon expect elsewhere in Central Asia, given the age of its leaderships. Thus the dynamics of this succession are viewed in their regional as well as domestic context.

In similar fashion, this monograph examines in detail Niyazov's energy policies and the rivalry among the key players—Russia, Iran, China, and America—for influence over the future disposition of those holdings and the destination of future pipeline projects either to China, Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan (through the Caspian Sea), and to Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan. This great power rivalry also encompasses Russian and Iranian,

if not Chinese efforts to persuade Turkmenistan to renounce in deed or in rhetoric the neutrality that was Niyazov's consistent policy and join one or another of the regional security blocs that they are proposing. On the other side of the ledger, Washington is seeking to ensure that Turkmenistan's gas goes to states and markets other than exclusively to Russia and supports new pipelines like those to China, a projected pipeline to India through Afghanistan and Pakistan, and a Trans-Caspian pipeline to Azerbaijan. Therefore, the rivalries over Turkmen energy and security policies are entwined with each other, and the examination of the nature of the great powers' policy programs underscores the importance of Central Asia in global energy and security agendas. Finally, the monograph also makes specific recommendations to American policymakers as to how they should proceed in trying to ensure and even widen Turkmenistan's effective sovereignty and advance American interests in behalf of a Central Asian energy or security system that is not monopolized by Moscow.

TURKMENISTAN AND CENTRAL ASIA AFTER NIYAZOV

INTRODUCTION

The sudden death of Turkmenistan's President Sapirmurad Niyazov on December 21, 2006, will have profound repercussions for his country, but the consequences for Central Asia are also very significant. Aside from the risks this succession presents to Central Asian and other interested governments, this succession also represents an opportunity for Turkmenistan and these other interested parties, including the United States, to move forward both domestically and in their relations with Ashgabat.[1] In this vein, U.S. State Department officials publicly say that the advent of a new regime represents an opportunity for Washington to improve relations with Turkmenistan on issues of mutual concern and have held to this line since Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice sent the official letter of condolence to Turkmenistan.[2]

Similarly, published accounts from the Caspian region reflect a balance between hopes for improved conditions and fears of potential risks due to internal instability and the possibility of intensified external rivalry for influence over Turkmenistan's future course.[3] For example, Shokirjon Hakimov, the leader of Tajikistan's opposition Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan, stated that, "Undoubtedly, if the forthcoming political activities in Turkmenistan concerning the designation of the country's leader take place in a civilized manner, then they will certainly have a positive influence on the development of pluralism in the region."[4] At the same time, the statement

of Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister Kasymzhomart Tokayev revealed both his government's hopes and its apprehensions. Tokayev said that his government has an interest in Turkmenistan's stability. Therefore "Kazakhstan is not going to get involved in any wars for Turkmenistan."[5]

The risks were clear even before Niyazov's death. Indeed, immediately after it, many Central Asian politicians and some, though not the majority, of analysts in Central Asia and Russia expressed genuine fears for an eruption of instability in Turkmenistan.[6] These were not isolated fears. Many analysts, including this author, have been warning for some years before Niyazov's demise that the succession in Turkmenistan or in other Central Asian states could well lead to violence, and/or that other Central Asian states also face the threat of violence when they will experience successions.[7] There is also good reason to suspect that the ruling oligarchy that took over Turkmenistan in the wake of Niyazov's death also feared domestic unrest and therefore has moved to alleviate domestic conditions by promises of some social and economic reforms.[8] Reports of prison riots upon the announcement of Niyazov's death and of a crisis in agriculture due to a poor fall harvest suggest the possibilities for internal violence.[9] Likewise, the usual level of surveillance was upgraded, and the border with Uzbekistan was closed when Niyazov died.[10]

Due to the nature of Niayzov's rule and the confluence of internal and external pressures upon Turkmenistan, this succession can serve as a "precedent-setting experience" that will illuminate key elements of Central Asian politics and political structures and set the table for the work of the successor generation. That generation's political preferences and policies

are already constrained by the manner in which these successions were arranged. So, if the successions to Niyazov and to his Central Asian colleagues turn out to aggravate past misrule, "the stage will be set in Central Asia for more radical changes that could reverberate far beyond remote regional boundaries."[11]

The Niyazov succession already gives every sign of confirming past forecasts, like that of Eugene Rumer of the U.S. National Defense University, about Central Asian successions in general. Rumer wrote in 2003 that,

> The patterns of domestic politics in Central Asia since independence suggest that political transition in the region is likely to be nontransparent to outsiders. It will probably be decided by, at most a handful of power brokers chosen on the basis of their positions of prominence in an official or unofficial structure—a government agency, clan, ethnic group, or family, or regional grouping. Existing constitutional and legal arrangements are more likely to be used to legitimize the power brokers' decision than serve as the guide for their action.[12]

So it was in the Turkmen case. Evidently the surviving members of Niyazov's regime who quickly banded together to arrange a succession process and successor also shared these fears about instability. Their actions testify to their fears concerning who might succeed Niyazov and what those actors might do or the forces they might utilize to attain the succession.[13] They are, in fact, so insecure about their position and methods of securing it once Niyazov died that they publicly complained about Russian media reports that accurately portrayed their machinations as a coup.[14] Similarly, given Turkmenistan's poor relations with Uzbekistan, whose government helped conspire

against Niyazov in a 2002 coup, the border with Uzbekistan was closed, and, according to reports from local human rights activists, "defense ministry forces, particularly motorized forces, are on a state of alert in border areas."[15] These deployments were apparently part of a broader crackdown across Turkmenistan, using all elements of the country's military and police forces.[16]

The fears expressed by foreign analysts and implicitly conceded by the post-Niyazov regime are not just that Turkmenistan may undergo civil violence, but that this violence could spread to neighboring Central Asian states. Moreover, a violent succession struggle in one state could well contain exemplary lessons for others. For example, in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, we have seen efforts by members of the president's family to acquire key posts in the government and these countries' economic life and possibly even to position themselves to succeed their fathers or fathers-in law. In Turkmenistan as well, there were many rumors that Niyazov's 39-year-old son Murat, who had been living abroad, was being groomed for the succession.[17]

However, immediately upon Niyazov's death, another successor was picked, as Deputy Prime Minister Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov became Acting President until the election of February 11, 2007, which was, as expected, anything but a truly democratic choice. At the same time, in confirmation of Rumer's remarks above, Chairman of the Mejlis (Parliament) Ovezgeldi Atayev, the constitutionally designated interim successor to Niyazov, was arrested and deposed from his post, while constitutional manipulations were rammed through the parliament stating that anyone who had lived outside the country like Murat Niyazov

was ineligible to run for the presidency.[18] It was also then reported by the opposition that Niyazov's Defense Minister and 100 other officials had been arrested—obviously to ensure control and loyalty of the army—and that Niyazov's personal treasurer, a man who clearly knew too many secrets, had fled.[19] Opposition figures in Turkmenistan were also reportedly arrested as well.[20] Although the Turkmen government denied that the Defense Minister had been arrested, it had to concede that he could not be reached, another sign of its insecurity.[21]

These machinations suggest an effort to eliminate rivals to the Turkmen Presidential Security Service led by its Chairman, Akmyrat Rezhepov, who reportedly engineered these manipulations and actions to unseat any efforts by Niyazov's family or immediate clan to rule after him.[22] According to one report from *www.ferghana.ru* (Russian news website), Berdymukhammedov, as Health Minister, was the first to be told of Niyazov's death and promptly called the Security Council into session where, with Rezhepov's direction, it violated the Constitution and made him interim president. The argument here goes that if he had not done so, Rezhepov would have arrested both him and Atayev for failing to protect the president.[23] While this report cannot be confirmed, its plausibility gives a good idea of the atmosphere under Niyazov.

Likewise, these machinations betray a desire to frustrate meaningful, as opposed to cosmetic, reform of the power structure. Reforms are likely only to the degree that they reduce domestic pressure for an explosion, not as signs of an authentic liberalizing trend designed from above. For example, apart from the constitutional machinations allowing Berdymukhammeov to run, there were other amendments to the Constitution. One

change reorganized the State Security Council that brings together the heads of all the security services, the prosecution service, and high-ranking military officers. This Council now has the power to convene the Parliament or People's Council (Halk Maslahaty) if the Turkmen President cannot do so. This provision gives the Security Council a role in state governance and legislation beyond its traditional role of defending the state.[24] Further amendments have diluted the power of the Halk Maslahaty by enlarging it and putting the new leaders into it. All organizations under the ruling National Movement for Renewal under the aegis of the pro-President Democratic party can approach the new leadership directly, i.e., bypassing the Halk Malahaty. Although no successor has been appointed to replace Atayev, this is not important since it is the Secretary of the Security Council who will take over in case of emergency.[25]

Certainly few observers see a society ready for democracy and believe that the most likely and safest course for the foreseeable future is the creation of an oligarchy based on an intra-elite compact mitigating repression in return for loyalty and more secure possession of the spoils by those elite. This is, broadly speaking, what happened in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) after Stalin, in China after Mao, and what could happen in Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan. Then in the longer run we may see a kind of lawless privatization as in Russia that ultimately eventuates in the creation of a new and presumably durable ruling class and more impersonal, even quasi-bureaucratic authoritarianism. And this may be the best alternative we and the Turkmens can hope for. Certainly the alternative, if the elites cannot compose their differences, is almost sure to be civil strife and

violence that opens the door to unpredictable and even potentially radical outcomes.[26]

Whether or not any reforms that do take place have such consequences is another question. History is full of unintended consequences emerging from elite manipulations during successions in both the Soviet and post-Soviet cases. Meanwhile, this abrupt constitutional engineering also displayed Turkmen leaders' deep fears that opposition members, who had also been compelled to go abroad during Niyazov's rule, might return and win power, perhaps in a scenario reminiscent of previous "color revolutions," including foreign assistance.

In this respect, the simultaneous effort to block Niyazov's family and the opposition highlighted what we might expect in future Central Asian successions. Recent research suggests that in all of the Central Asian states, leaders who have come to power based on the backing of a group of clans have sought to emancipate themselves from that constraining factor and establish their own personal and family authority to the resentment of the clans.[27] Arguably, in Kyrgyzstan one factor in the Tulip Revolution of 2005 was the effort to stop President Askar Akayev's family from gaining even more wealth and power through their official connections. So we may see future struggles in the other Central Asian states between the ruling family and other contenders who wish to claim the spoils for themselves and their entourage once the leader dies or loses power.

At the same time, this succession suggests another and parallel danger to the Turkmen and other Central Asian elites. Much of Central Asian politics since March, 2005, including the infamous Andizhan massacre of Uzbek demonstrators on May 13, 2005,

revolves precisely around local governments' efforts, backed by Moscow, to prevent another Tulip, Rose, or Orange Revolution in their lands. Thus the importance of family and clan rivalries among elites as well as opposition to a more open and transparent form of politics (that is, however, not to be confused with liberal democracy) will probably be central motifs in all future succession struggles in Central Asia, just as in Turkmenistan. Another key issue in these successions will obviously be control of the various means of force in these states, particularly the forces of the Ministry of Interior that are the key forces in these states and the best funded ones as well. Both the Turkmen example and recent research on clans in Central Asia points to the importance of their demands to control the means of force and rulers' efforts to keep that control in their own hands.[28]

Furthermore, even if violence did not break out right after Niyazov's death, the possibility of a long and bitter struggle for power that could erupt into violence cannot be ruled out. Stalin's heirs feared domestic unrest in the wake of his death and began to reduce the pressure within the Stalinist system that they feared could trigger such unrest even though they hardly contemplated democratization. Arguably a similar dynamic is at work in Turkmenistan and may also appear in such repressive states as Uzbekistan once it experiences a succession to President Islam Karimov. It is noteworthy that in both the Stalinist and Turkmen cases the impetus for reform from above comes from the candidate widely assumed to have the backing or be in control of the secret police. This could be one reason why Berdymukhammedov has called for reform in early 2007.[29] The similarities to post-Stalin events are also striking in that Stalin's death led to numerous

uprisings in the Soviet Gulag system, which convinced leaders that some of the pressure upon society had to be released. A similar dynamic could take place or already be in operation in Turkmenistan.

Neither should we rule out the possibility of foreign intervention, either in purely political form or even with force, if the situation should deteriorate far enough in the future. Some foreign observers believe that the calls for modest reforms and some releases of political prisoners from above owe something to foreign pressure.[30] This pressure probably is grounded in the new regime's apprehension concerning the future stability of Turkmenistan. Consequently, the ensuing advocacy of reforms is intended to rebuild or shore up that stability.[31] In addition, Russia's effort to extend its influence in Central Asia has taken the form of securing air bases and signing treaties with states like Uzbekistan that are widely believed to include provisions for coming to the aid of threatened regimes with military forces who could be airlifted in from Russia. It may be coincidental but Russia announced its agreement with Uzbekistan to obtain an air base at Navoi the day Niyazov died, despite previous denials that the two states were talking about such issues.[32]

Given the nature of Niyazov's sultanistic rule that sought to exclude both domestic and foreign claimants for influence over his policies, the domestic struggle for power and external governments' rivalry for influence in a precarious Central Asia are likely not only to follow parallel tracks but to intersect. Because of Turkmenistan's large gas holdings and critical role in Russia's political economy that is largely based on the securing of energy rents, acute foreign interest and involvement in post-Niyazov maneuverings is almost predetermined. This foreign involvement also

encompasses action by other Central Asian states and the other major powers that have significant interests in Central Asia and Turkmenistan on behalf of one or another faction in the post-Niyazov contest. Official Russia's first reaction, for example, was to call for stability and consistency toward developing ties with Russia, for maintaining its contractual obligations towards Moscow, and for a "lawful" or "predictable" succession.[33]

Thus Russia wants domestic stability, continuing one-sided energy contracts that give it a stranglehold on Turkmen energy, and, if possible, a gradual ending of Niyazov's erratic "absolute neutrality" foreign policy that prevented Moscow from realizing its complete military and foreign policy objectives in Central Asia. Should Turkmenistan move into Moscow's economic and defense blocs for Central Asia, The Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Russia will have gone far to consolidating its position as the sponsor of a virtually closed bloc in Central Asia.

Certainly the outcome of the struggle for succession will depend at least to some degree on the contending factions' foreign connections. Russia has already moved to ensure the stability of its energy relations with and interests in Turkmenistan.[34] In addition, the extent to which Niyazov's successors can maintain his form of rule or are obliged to move toward a more conventional and bureaucratic form of authoritarian rule likewise depends in some measure upon the degree to which they receive either foreign support or foreign pressure for reform.[35] Some scholars, e.g., Martha Olcott of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, claim that this point was true before so that

if, for example, Moscow and Washington had really pushed for reforms, they might well have occurred even if in attenuated form.[36] Some commentaries are already suggesting that Berdymukhammedov's appointment as Acting President represents a victory for Moscow over other foreign powers interested in Turkmenistan's developments.[37] And several Russian commentators early on expressed their belief that the post-Niyazov situation will "not make things worse for Moscow."[38] In other words, Russia, as could be expected, will not intervene on behalf of significant reform. Given President Putin's diatribe about the Organizaation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) at the 2007 Munich Wehrkunde Conference and his government's consistent belief that America is responsible for fomenting so-called color revolutions throughout the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), this outcome is to be expected.[39]

It is not clear that Russia had an immediate candidate or that the coup plotters in Turkmenistan were inclining to Russian interests when they selected Berdymukhammedov. So Moscow may have maintained some initial distance to ensure that there was stability and no immediate violence.[40] But it will not absent itself from participation in the ensuing succession struggle. Even so, few expect Moscow to have the foreign field all to itself even if it is the most likely external and most vitally interested external actor in this struggle.

NIYAZOV'S RULE, CLANS, AND THE SUCCESSION STRUGGLE

Niyazov's rule, death, and the circumstances surrounding the latter illustrate both the domestic

issues at stake in Turkmenistan and beyond as well as the likely methods by which future successions could be resolved in Central Asia. Niyazov fully incarnated the idea of *l'etat c'est moi*. In fact, he systematically "disempowered" the state's formal institutions. As a result, we see in his Turkmenistan an almost perfect example of what Max Weber called sultanism or the patrimonial state. Indeed, Niyazov relentlessly promoted the idea of his being the father of the entire country, not least to reduce the influence of clans and other tribes in government. In this respect, he only represented an extreme form of the policies pursued by his colleagues as presidents of other Central Asian regimes, all of whom have sought to create an invented imaginary nation from their peoples as part of their policies, not least to reduce the influence of clan elements in their countries.[41]

Niyazov's efforts to disempower other institutions that could provide alternative sources of power and personalize his power are also discernible in the list of offices he held. He is not only head of the state but also prime minister; he is chairman of the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan and the People's Council; he heads the Security Council, chairs the Council of Religious Affairs, and is supreme commander of the National Armed Forces. The president used to make all major political, economic, and cadre decisions; and personally supervised all ministries, state agencies, and regional administrations.[42]

He alone made energy policy decisions and ruled with an iron fist; conducting massive repression of all possible opponents. He endlessly rotated elites in and out of office to prevent anyone from developing a power base or following.[43] Another objective typical of totalitarian or sultanistic type rulers was to prevent

the crystallization of cohesive socio-political structures and networks that could be a barrier to his total control over the polity and society. It follows logically from the preceding analysis that the chief instrument of his rule was the secret police, the agency that appears to have taken a decisive role in the succession.[44] Niyazov's rule, as almost every previous and subsequent commentary indicated, was likewise characterized by his utter capriciousness and venality, which was well served by his total control over all aspects of the energy business in Turkmenistan.[45] He also had been charged with running drugs through and from Turkmenistan and with cooperating with and supplying arms to the Taliban to add to his wealth.[46]

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that so many observers expressed concern that Niyazov's succession could lead to major instability in Turkmenistan. Given the similarities between his style of rule and Stalin's, such concerns about potential domestic unrest typify both sultanistic or patrimonial regimes during succession crises and of post-Soviet leadership politics.[47] Succession crises are the Achilles heel of these systems, not least because so much political and economic power is at stake for all the players and because there is nowhere to which someone who loses can safely retire. Whoever loses, loses all, quite possibly including his life. Furthermore, since all concerned are creatures of Niyazov who cannot a priori trust each other, this succession, like its earlier analogues in Russia, will probably be an inherently unstable affair.[48]

Furthermore, thanks to Niyazov's policies, no civil society exists that could serve as a social base for some sort of challenge to authoritarianism. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that the absence of a civil society correlates with the expectation of a succession struggle

because these two phenomena of political life go together. Where political power and the succession to power cannot be legitimated by law, even under an authoritarian polity, e.g., a Rechtstaat or rule of law state, succession crises invariably involve coups, purges, and the like where the public is excluded from participation. Indeed, no civil society can truly emerge if political power is unbound even by its own laws.[49]

Neither is it surprising, then, that the control over the various armed forces is so critical or that the secret police may themselves sponsor some limited reforms to stabilize the situation at least temporarily. This point applies as well to Russian and other Central Asian successions. As both the succession to Askar Akayev in Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution of 2005 and this succession show, the absence of any kind of legal legitimization of power or its transfer opens the way either to revolution or to insider coups. Thus it is unlikely that future successions in Central Asia or Russia (and we can see this already in Russian legislation for the forthcoming election of 2008) will show any authentic process toward the creation of a state bound by law with the accompanying development of the establishment of some concept of genuine group or individual rights. Until and unless this happens, hopes for Turkmenistan's or Central Asia's progress towards a more modern form of statehood can only be guarded at best. Instead, in Turkmenistan we see a polity whose apparent primary basis of affiliation supposedly is the premodern formation of either the tribe or the clan. At least so claim many of the journalistic and contemporary accounts.[50] And the clan by definition is a hidden, premodern nontransparent sociological formation by which the state's power, offices, and rents from its many properties are appropriated by

subethnic, kinship, or otherwise connected private and generally self-constituted groups at the expense of law, political, and economic development.[51] This phenomenon of the primacy of clan or tribal affiliations in politics is typical of Central Asia despite Soviet efforts at socialist modernization and post-Soviet governance and constitutes a major obstacle to both political and economic modernization and effective state governance.[52]

But because Turkmenistan was so totally closed to outsiders and thus inhospitable to research, very little is actually known rather than speculated about when it comes to discussions of Turkmen politics. Therefore we cannot be sure just how potent a socio-political form of organization tribes or clans actually are although there are signs that Niyazov, like his colleagues, sought to emancipate himself from them to cement his absolute rule.[53] Like his colleagues, but with greater success and absolutism, Niyazov concentrated power and authority in the capital and in himself at the expense of regional and other authorities, reorganized patronage and authority chains exclusively in his favor and effected a radical redistribution of power, rents, and revenues for his benefit.[54]

Thus, in discussing clans' role in the evolving succession to Niyazov, we may see the formation of networks based, as was and is the case in Soviet and post-Soviet Kazakhstan and probably across Central Asia, upon multiple actors incorporating kinship structures along with other nonkinship groups. Both sets of groups then come together to obtain scarce tangible and intangible resources, e.g., political power and the perquisites attached to it, through mutual aid.[55] Although kinship structures like clans or tribes may play a role or even be the main form of socio-political

affiliation within these political factions, they are united mainly by a common quest for access to limited resources. The resources they seek are, in this case, the political power and control of political offices and the rents that accrued to them under Niyazov (as well as his colleagues elsewhere in Central Asia) and which would accrue to them even more after his demise.[56]

The term clan might be used to describe such networks in common parlance even though it may lack scholarly precision. But these people and the groups they constitute are bound by ties of kinship, immediate family, education, (the old school tie), and formalized rites of obligation which still play a role as a basis for collective action in Central Asia, as well as other obligations derived from or arising out of formalized social processes of exchange of favors or goods. These mechanisms of group identity, group norms of social behavior, and collective action can be utilized not just for purposes of insider coups but also for purposes of revolution. This evidently occurred in Kyrgyzstan in 2005.[57] At the same time, these rites of exchange pertain to both physical goods and services as they do to intangible, purely political ones.

This kind of socio-political formation or network, even if it contains or overlaps with clan or tribal-based organizations, remains pervasive among post-Soviet societies. Russia historically has been and remains an "economy of favors," and the phenomenon of clans in Central Asia, whether in the traditional precise form or in the modernized version, which is based on scarcity of resources, resembles it.[58] In this sense, Central Asia obviously parallels Russia in certain key aspects; even though the Russian system of networks of collective action goes far beyond family affiliation to include several other mechanisms of patronage and favors and

is much more historically evolved.[59] At the same time, this resemblance also underscores the authoritarian character of both Russia and of Central Asian states, their common premodern political structure, shared antipathy to group or individual rights, including property rights, and therefore their inherent common vulnerability to succession crises.

On the other hand, in the absence of any solid social structures or even the merest hint of civil society, tribes, clans, or a kind of invented simulation of their revival may be all that politically interested actors can now rely upon in Turkmenistan, if not Central Asia as a whole. The validity or enduring vitality of clans or tribes as representing the basis of political leadership and legitimacy after Niyazov can only be answered over time. The International Crisis Group, for example, claims that, "new networks of political and economic patronage, deriving in part from Soviet times, appear to play a much larger role than traditional clan networks."[60] Be that as it may, it is likely that an attempt or attempts will be made to invest these clan or tribal bases of social affiliation with a new, even if artificial, life in order to give one or another successor to Niyazov an air of legitimacy.

Such efforts need not be made only by contending Turkmen elites. Some reports charged that Russia was moving quickly to support one or another clan, or Berdymukhammedov.[61] Ultimately these "updated," or "simulated," or even actual clans might coalesce into one or a small number of contending elite groups or become distinct social realities forming a combination of modern and pre-modern elites based on reciprocal ties of social exchange, kinship, and other shared elements. But for that to happen, Turkmenistan must visibly evolve from the patrimonial or sultanistic

rule of Niyazov to a more bureaucratized form of authoritarianism. In other words, it must move under its new leaders towards becoming something more like a state than a private preserve.[62]

Certainly there is a crying need for development of "stateness" before there is likely to be progress toward a rule of law state, let alone a democracy. This is a major problem for Turkmenistan and for Central Asia as a whole. Most assessments of Central Asia point to governments that possess few resources and capabilities for dealing with the multiple social, economic, and environmental challenges to stability or the tensions they generate. Thus, one 1999 study of Turkmenistan's bureaucracy offers the following, highly negative, assessment:

> Historically, there has been no Turkmenian civil service as a professional corps. Since Soviet times, recruitment, assessment, and promotion have been on an ad hoc ministry to ministry basis. Low, post-independence salaries and the resultant corruption have affected civil servants' professionalism negatively, caused them to have a bad reputation, and has made coherent policy toward them difficult. That is not to say that the Turkmenian bureaucracy is altogether incapable. Informal, social relations among officials enable the system to function. However, what technical capability Turkmenistan's civil service possesses pertains to fulfilling centrally planned goals and implementing the Communist party [or now Niyazov's—author] line. It has no experience with either democratic government or free enterprise. The country thus has some highly skilled officials, but they lack knowledge in such areas as economic and financial management, human resources, and legal and organizational development. Hence, creating a bureaucracy to support self-sustaining institutions for collective decision-making and efficient resource allocation poses a particularly daunting task.[63]

If anything, thanks to Niyazov's caprices, the situation has deteriorated with respect to this bureaucracy's quality since then. In the meantime, this evaluation could also apply across the board to the other Central Asian and post-Soviet states in the former Soviet Union.

THE SUCCESSION STRUGGLE

This need for something that resembles or actually is elite solidarity, plus the fear of popular unrest, and the mutual fear of all of Niyazov's creatures that they not fall out with each other and trigger that unrest or lose everything thereby may explain, for instance, why there are rumors that Berdymukhammedov is somehow related to Niyazov or may have been his illegitimate son (since he is 17 years younger than Niyazov, this is possible but unlikely).[64] It also looks like tribal and clan affiliations or the effort to advertise them as operative were connected with the leadership of the secret police under Niyazov and an instrumental factor in the first moves to arrange the succession. It certainly looks like the secret police are currently the real power behind the throne, although one cannot yet predict their ultimate victory. Indeed, Andrei Grozin, Chief of the Department of Central Asia and Caucasus of the institute of CIS Studies in Moscow, believes the Ministry of Interior ultimately has the best chance to prevail.[65]

This outcome is not surprising in that Niyazov, as could be expected, left behind no chosen successor, mechanism, or procedure for choosing one. Civil society had been destroyed, and any potential opposition to his rule is either in prison or in exile. After all, if offices are constantly rotated by Niyazov's caprice, it becomes

next to impossible for elites to form enduring bases of patron-client exchange and loyalty or to do so on the basis of clan or tribal affiliation.[66] Indeed, it is almost impossible, then, to postulate the existence of a state in the modern sense of the term. Thus it is hardly surprising that immediately after the announcement of Niyazov's death at 1:10 AM on December 21, 2006, the succession seems to have been rapidly decided by means of a coup led by members of the government who united in one faction against other members of the elite to ensure their unchallenged position.

Indeed, the rapidity with which everything was arranged suggests that more was happening than was publicly stated or can be inferred from public reports. First, at least one Russian analyst publicly charged that Niyazov's death was suspicious and may have been arranged by members of his own entourage.[67] Second, it is unlikely that people can be gotten together so quickly and act so decisively at that hour of the night unless they knew in advance what was coming or had a prearranged plan, i.e., were already conspiring together. Interestingly enough, Berdymukhammedov represented Turkmenistan at the latest CIS summit in Minsk in November 2006, so Niyazov's health may well have been failing by then.[68] Third, we also now know from the official medical report released on Niyazov's death that he was much sicker than anyone had let on.[69] Clearly he suffered from a serious case of heart disease and hypertension, and was also rumored to have diabetes. Some analysts claim that we should have known or even that it was known that he was in poor health because his public appearances had been cut back.[70]

If these rumors of declining health are true, they, and the speed with which the succession was

organized, could lend support to the charges made by the opposition and repeated by some foreign analyses that Niyazov had in fact died two or three days earlier or was dying and his regime (if not some foreign governments as well) knew it.[71] Therefore they had time to arrange a new ruling faction and exclude those whom they regarded as potential threats. This charge has also surfaced as speculation with regard to an Iran-Armenian energy deal that was announced on December 19, 2006, for which Turkmen gas was to be the key.[72]

We will probably never, or at least not for a long time, know the exact details surrounding Niyazov's death, another fact that resembles the details of Stalin's death and the frenzied maneuvering that went on then, phenomena that again suggests the comparison between both men's form of rule. But it is very clear that the people who organized Berdymukhammedov's succession moved very quickly to enthrone him and remove all potential opposition.

Article 61 of the Turkmen constitution stated that the Chairman of Parliament will assume the President's duties if the President cannot meet his or her obligations. New presidential elections "should be held within 2 months from the day when the chairman of Mejlis [parliament] takes over the President's duties."[73] The law also stipulated that Niyazov's successor should be the current Chairman or Speaker of the Halk Maslahaty. Few details are known about Atayev who was the current Speaker of Turkmenistan's Parliament when Niyazov died. Obviously, as was the case for all members of Parliament, he held his position with Niyazov's blessing. The constitution, however, stated that the person who steps in as acting president "cannot be nominated for the presidency."[74] Nevertheless, none

of these considerations deterred the coup plotters.

Atayev was arrested immediately after Niyazov's death, and Berdymukhammedov was appointed to be interim president and chairman of the funeral arrangements, another resemblance to the Soviet heritage. Then he became the official nominee for President through constitutional manipulation of the relevant articles. Summarizing the developments within a week of Niyazov's death, C. J. Chivers of the *New York Times* reported that,

> Once he [Berdymukhammedov] took the job, he was barred by the Constitution from seeking office. But that obstacle was overcome on Tuesday (December 26, 2006) at a meeting of Turkmenistan's People's Council, which seemed firmly in his control. It granted him eligibility to run and then nominated him unanimously. The manipulations continued. The latest election law, passed almost simultaneously, barred citizens who have lived outside Turkmenistan in recent years from becoming candidates—a rule that blocked the best-known opposition figures from entering the race. By the time the new law was announced, the only publicly known opposition figure inside Turkmenistan who had not been in prison, Nurberdy Nurmammedov of the Agzybirlik movement, had disappeared.[75]

Further repressions against the opposition have continued, and there are also unconfirmed reports that Niyazov's Defense Minister, who would be a key player given his control over the army, was also arrested.[76] Then the Halk Maslahaty arranged an "election" for February 11, 2007, whereby Berdymukhammedov would run against five hand-picked candidates who have to be nominated by two-thirds of the Parliament after they are chosen by the city of Ashgabat, each of Turkmenistan's five regions, and the ruling Galkynysh

party.[77] Not surprisingly, Berdymukhammedov won easily.

The speed and apparent ease with which these operations have been concluded seemingly rebuts the widespread fears of a succession struggle. But, as suggested above, they also highlight the possibility that these moves were planned in advance of the announcement of Niyazov's demise. Despite the initial success of the coup, we should not conclude that the succession struggle is over or that violence has been ruled out. This also was the case in Stalin's succession, the real struggle only began once he had been dead for a few days or weeks.[78]

Let us remember that the Speaker of the Parliament, several regime opponents, and possibly the Defense Minister have all been arrested rather than be allowed to run for the presidency. These arrests may signify speed and apparent unity in the ranks of the coup plotters, but they also betray a deep insecurity concerning their position and knowledge of the limited capacity of people dominated by the secret police to appeal to the public. If we pursue the analogy with the Stalin succession further, it is quite possible that just as that succession became violent or potentially so, with the Army being brought in to arrest Beria in the summer of 1953 and then again in 1957 to ensure Khrushchev's victory, that the armed forces or secret police or both will again be invoked in Turkmenistan's struggle for power.

Furthermore, there are numerous signs that Berdymukhammedov knows his position is weak and insecure. One example may be his call for reforms in January 2007.[79] Second, the constitutional manipulations that were needed to ensure Berdymukhammedov's ascension to power were notably crass, for example,

changing the order of succession so that he, a Deputy Premier and Vice-Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers, became the heir designate as the Speaker, Atrayev, was "no longer capable" of assuming that role. Indeed, Berdymukhammedov had not attained the age necessary under the original constitution to be named President. So they had to change the constitution to let anyone from 40 to 70 years old be eligible. As one analysis of this "charade" observes, "Similar ad hoc constitutional amendments are quite typical for this type of regime change, as the case of Syria demonstrates."[80]

Finally as this analysis continues, Berdymukhammedov's formal position remains quite weak.

> The amendments to the Constitution made the National Security Council (with Redzhepov at its head) the most powerful organ in Turkmenistan, along with the Presidency. The current Constitution incorporated this organ to be a new power institution. It also provides the Council the right to convene a meeting of the Halk Maslahaty in case the President is unable to hold office. In such a case, the Council, appointing an ad interim President, lacks any counterweight. And since there is no definition of the President's "incapability," he could practically be impeached by the Council (i.e., Rezhepov now) at any moment and could conceivably be replaced by a more suitable person according to these provisions. The new elites have been playing the game according to their own rules, and appear to consider neither the Halk Maslahaty nor the Turkmen Constitution to be the key fundaments of the state. Thus the laws and particularly the Constitution could stay behind again in case another need arises to legitimize some new situation.[81]

Certainly this domestic struggle for power could take new and even unexpected twists and is quite capable of turning violent, going beyond political intrigues to

encompass political murders, imprisonments, exiles, and even tribal or clan conflicts. Berdymukhammedov's calls for reforms show the recognition of the widespread economic distress throughout the country, with people not getting health care, or their pensions, or probably their salaries, and nobody having any clear idea of Turkmenistan's economic picture. It is probably this combination of economic distress and foreign pressure for stability, as well as fear of being outbid by other rivals for power, that impelled Berdymukhammedov to announce reforms such as opening internet access and student access to foreign universities, creation of a culture of entrepreneurship, increasing of oil and natural gas production, development of more modern transportation and communications, payment of wages on time, and restoration of pension benefits and access to health care that had been suspended by Niyazov.[82]

Still, if the situation does turn violent, an insurgency may grow out of intertribal or clan warfare and provide opportunities for Islamist organizations, but the latter, as well as the opposition, were clearly unable to exploit the interregnum before the elections. However, if there are such groups with connections in Turkmenistan, they could become an ally or adjunct to one or another contender for power and then subsequently seek to take advantage of the situation.

Then violence could well spill over into neighboring Central Asian states like Uzbekistan. The Uzbek regime already worries about this phenomenon because it happened during the Tajik civil war of 1992-97, and it regards the possibility of violence, especially in Fergana Valley, with considerable apprehension. Moreover, we can see that the situation in Kyrgyzstan is also highly precarious with an estimated 53 percent of the gross national product (GNP) going into the shadow economy

and a regime dominated by corruption and criminality which enjoys little or no trust among Parliament or the people who are similarly divided into clans, tribes, and regional factions. Moreover, Kyrgyzstan's ongoing constitutional crisis continues, and the Bakiyev regime can hardly be called a consolidated one.[83] The same consideration holds true for Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.[84] Given this regional instability, the likelihood of violence should the Turkmen succession struggle turn out to be protracted and violent could provide opportunities for more Islamically inclined organizations to act either in Turkmenistan or elsewhere in Central Asia, using Turkmen or other external connections.

FOREIGN STAKES AND INVOLVEMENT IN TURKMENISTAN

Russia.

Given the stakes in Central Asia, we should duly expect to see strong foreign involvement, most likely behind the scenes, in the domestic struggle for Niyazov's mantle. Russia's interests are the most extensive and vital, at least to it. As Mikhail Margelov, Head of the Russian Federation Council's Committee on International Affairs, commented:

> For us, though, in the Russian Federation, it is vitally important, regardless of developments, to keep Turkmenistan as a partner, both in the context of the international counter-terrorist struggle and in the context of the complex games being played out in the post-Soviet space as well as in the economic sphere. Regardless of who will be in power in Ashgabat tomorrow, we need a friendly, comprehensible, and predictable Turkmenistan.[85]

In other words, Russian aims extend to including Turkmenistan in its energy plans, its security organization for Central Asia, and in excluding American influence from the area. That Russia now entertains the possibility of setting up an Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)-like gas cartel with Iran greatly magnifies Turkmenistan's strategic importance to Moscow since it is a major producer of gas and the source upon which Moscow relies to provide gas at subsidized prices to its consumers and to the CIS as a whole.[86] These considerations make Turkmenistan, from Moscow's viewpoint, a state whose submission to Russian direction is an absolutely vital interest. Russia's interests are not attached to or dependent upon whomever rules Turkmenistan. Certainly Moscow had frequently considered and toyed with removing Niyazov from politics, e.g., in the coup against him of 2002 that had Russian backing.[87]

Thus there will be a significant foreign dimension to the succession struggle. Just as we saw a scramble for succession after Stalin's death and efforts to recruit foreign Communist parties, most notably China's, to impart legitimacy to various contenders in the Kremlin, we will likely see an analogous series of developments but with tribal and clan rivalry replacing or being superimposed upon factional alliances. But just as the post-Stalin leadership sought to forge support among foreign Communist governments in their rivalries for power, we might see the rival Turkmen factions do so even if foreign powers had wanted to remain aloof from Turkmenistan's domestic politics. In this rivalry among tribes and clans, as is generally the case with such contests, one or another clan—either actual or political—or tribe will probably already have or will

soon forge contacts with major foreign actors: Russia, China, Iran, and the United States.

Alternatively, one or another clan may have an orientation to one or another foreign power in the belief that by doing so it can gain more access to office, rents, etc. It also follows that in the succession struggle, each contestant for power will enjoy the political and material (if not military—arms supplies) support of one or another of the key external actors. While the machinations of the various rivals in the succession struggle may remain behind closed doors for a while at first, the foreign influence and possibly violent struggles will probably soon become discernible.

While Russia has the most at stake for good or bad in this foreign rivalry, the United States enters into this contest the most disadvantaged among the four major powers because of its distance from Turkmenistan, its relatively smaller interest in developments there, and Niyazov's neutrality policy that kept Turkmenistan at arm's length from everyone. Most of all, it is disadvantaged because, unlike Russia, it has previously not been willing to spend large amounts of political and economic resources to subsidize Central Asian states, bribe rulers, or ensure that energy and other rents flow securely to them first, guarantee these rulers' physical security against insurgency, potentially guarantee their chosen successor, and support them against Western demands for greater liberalization and democracy or completely overlook their misrule. Until and unless Washington is ready to enter into such a competition with Moscow to provide these "public goods," it will operate at a disadvantage in the area.[88] For Washington to compete effectively with Russia, it will have to spend some of those "public goods." Calls for democracy and pluralism in the absence of a prior mutual confidence

and trust based upon America's willingness to invest resources in Turkmenistan are guaranteed to lead nowhere. In this context, Bedymukhammedov's calls for reform in education and health care and to eliminate drug addiction should be seen in Washington as an invitation to the United States to work with the new government to improve those conditions that threaten both the humanitarian and economic agenda in Turkmenistan, as well as its overall stability.[89]

Thus it is likely that Moscow, and to a lesser extent Beijing and Tehran, will seek mainly or firstly to ensure that their energy contracts and equities are safeguarded. Only afterwards will Russia and they push seriously to advance their overall defense and political agendas in Central Asia and Turkmenistan. Quite possibly two or all three of these states will join efforts to install or secure a candidate and clan or tribe of their own choosing in order to maintain Russian domination over energy flows, a nonviolent continuation of the status quo, insofar as this is possible, and aim gradually to reverse Niyazov's neutrality policy with a more overtly pro-Russian policy. It also is quite probable that Russian political and intelligence agencies have already identified in advance their candidate(s) for achieving these goals.

Indeed, reversing Niyazov's policy of absolute neutrality is the ultimate goal for most, if not all, of the foreign players except the United States which should champion Turkmenistan's genuine sovereignty above all else. The two states that have the most vital interest in Turkmenistan are Russia and Iran. For Russia, control over Turkmen gas supplies is essential because it is only by manipulating or arbitrating the price of Turkmen gas to Russia and keeping it well below global market prices that Moscow can sustain its antiquated

energy economy at home and make the substantial profits it is reaping abroad, mainly in Europe. In order to maintain the entire system of political economy upon which Putin's regime now is established, Moscow must continue to maintain its neo-colonial domination over pipelines and prices of Central Asian energy, especially gas. As of 2006, Russia was well on the way to accomplishing this goal. Thanks to gas deals with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan in 2005-06, Russia won a virtual monopoly right over the shipment of production of that gas. As the U.S. forecasting firm *Stratfor.biz* wrote in 2005,

> All natural gas produced in the former Soviet Union comes from Gazprom, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, or Turkmenistan, with any natural gas originating in a country ending in "stan" having to transit through Kazakhstan and Russia on its way to any market. The KazMunaiGaz deal means that Gazprom—and by extension the Kremlin—now owns *all* of that gas. Any state wishing to use Central Asian gas in order to get energy independence from Russia is now out of luck. This is particularly worrisome for states such as Ukraine and the Baltic states who now have no reasonable alternative to Russian-owned natural gas. Russia has been bandying the threat of sharply higher energy prices around for years. Now it has finally taken the concrete step necessary to make that an arbitrary reality.[90]

Niyazov certainly understood this game though he had few options in practice and in 2005-06 was clearly looking for alternatives. In fact, in 2006 before he died, he made significant progress along all three alternatives open to him. In one of his last speeches, he cited four alternative pipelines. These are (1) the pipeline to China through Kazakhstan and possibly Uzbekistan; (2) a second pipeline hugging the Caspian shoreline

through Kazakhstan to Russia and then Ukraine; (3) the so-called Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) or Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) line through Afghanistan to Pakistan and eventually India; and (4) and a potential pipeline through Afghanistan to Pakistan and from its ports to the United Arab Emirates (UAE).[91] In November 2006 he also claimed that the newly discovered field at Iolatan had reserves of 7 trillion cubic meters of gas, more than twice Russia's holdings at its Shtokman field, and he tried to interest German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeyer in joining with Russia to finance a pipeline bringing this gas to Europe, something that would transform the European gas scene.[92] If that claim is true, it would also force Gazprom to be less highhanded in its approach to Turkmenistan. And should some reforms in the direction of greater transparency come to the Turkmen energy industry, both Gazprom and the Ukraine might be forced to renegotiate for Turkmen gas, setting off a new round of competition for it with likely rises in the price paid to buy it.[93] Niyazov also approached the UAE to develop Caspian oil deposits so as to diversify his options further.[94] Thus Turkmenistan became potentially more attractive to other states as an alternative to dependence upon Russian gas, e.g., Georgia.[95]

The successes described below enabled Niyazov to compel Russia, after some months of tough negotiations, to buy gas at a higher price of $100 per thousand cubic meters (tcm) of gas, a demand that Russia acceded to for several reasons. First, Moscow did so because it could always pass the cost onto its consumers like Ukraine, Belarus, and possibly even Europe.[96] Second, given rising domestic demand which remains subsidized as well as rising European and

Asian demand for gas, it cannot meet its customers' contracts and maintain its domestic political economy without Turkmen gas. Thus this arrangement suited Moscow despite Niyazov's unpredictability. Even though he could always change his plans and clearly sought to diversify his outlets, making Turkmenistan an ongoing risk factor for Russia's gas balance, his earlier inability to escape Moscow's domination of existing pipelines worked to Russia's advantage. As one Russian analyst put it,

> Because of its reserves and also its position on the geographical map, Turkmenistan secured for Russia an almost monopoly position in the CIS gas market and also enabled it to dominate European markets. The closed nature of the Niyazov regime was even beneficial to Russia: virtually nobody could reach agreements with Turkmenbashy in circumvention of Russia although Niyazov himself always exploited such attempts in his bargaining with the Russian side. You only have to recall the constant negotiations with the "Orange regime" in Ukraine and the promise to "imminently" sign a strategic agreement on delivering all exportable gas to Ukraine for a 25-year period. Thanks to Turkmenistan, Russia can allow itself to maintain the monopoly on supplying gas to Ukraine (and elsewhere-author). In addition supplies from Turkmenistan expand the resource base of Gazprom, which is increasing gas exports to Europe.[97]

Foreign observers corroborate this finding. John Roberts, observed in *Platt's Oilgram* that "Niyazov had a peculiar style of dealing with foreign governments. On December 29, 2005, for example, he signed one agreement to sell gas to Ukraine in the morning and then in the afternoon signed another agreement with Russia's Gazprom that made it impossible for him to deliver on the Ukrainian accord."[98] This sequence played no small role in triggering the ensuing Ukrainian

gas crisis of January, 2006.

But by the second half of 2006, Russia also needed Niyazov's compliance with it more than had previously been the case, and he was able to utilize that trend for his benefit. Rising American and Polish, if not European, interest in a trans-Caspian pipeline to Europe bypassing Russia enhances Turkmenistan's position (which is why building such a pipeline would be very much to its as well as the West's interest). And Niyazov was also able to threaten Gazprom and Russia that failure to agree would lead to Turkmenistan cutting gas supplies to RosUkrEnergo, the firm set up to handle the sale of Russian gas to Ukraine. At the same time, Niyazov promised that, by signing this accord, supplies would be ensured through 2009 and urged Moscow to invest in the Iolatan fields that would ensure supplies through 2035. Thus Gazprom paid $6.5 billion for Turkmen friendship.[99]

Clearly Niayzov was not totally compliant with Russian preferences, even if he claimed that Russia was Turkmenistan's preferred partner whom it would not harm.[100] And in 2006 he was able to leverage other sources of exports which probably enhanced his bargaining stance vis-à-vis Moscow.

The second string to his policies, as noted above, was to cultivate alternatives like China. By 2006 China had agreed to conduct explorations and feasibility studies for a gas pipeline to be built by China and bring Turkmen gas to it starting in 2009. And in November 2006, China and Turkey agreed to conduct explorations at the newly discovered gas field at Iolatan.[101] The energy that Niyazov had promised China will evidently go through a pipeline from Turkmenistan to Kazakhstan and then to China through the new pipeline that is being built to ship Kazakh as well as Turkmen gas to

China.[102] So it is likely that China's main interest in the succession is to ensure that it is able to complete these projects with Turkmenistan to add to the number of reliable suppliers of oil and or gas that it is trying to establish. Given China's continuing stalemate with Russia over gas, the importance of access to all forms of Central Asian gas grow commensurately for China.[103] While the Turkmen opposition claims the pipeline is well behind schedule, the urgency of getting this energy will lead China probably to keep pushing for its rapid conclusion rather than to abandon it.[104]

Certainly Berdymukhammedov has made it clear that he intends to pursue the policy of maximizing alternatives for Turkmenistan by adhering to existing contracts and looking for new partners.[105] Indeed, there are reports that a preliminary agreement for the planned route of this pipeline through Kazakhstan has been reached.[106] After that, the main concern for Beijing is that Turkmenistan and Central Asia not explode. But it is unlikely that China will take an overt and leading position in subsequent Turkmen maneuverings. China's concerns, in the absence of countervailing American inducements to join with Washington on Central Asian policy, may well lead Beijing to support Russian initiatives regarding the new government in Ashgabat as part of its broader alliance with Moscow against U.S. military-political-ideological influence in Central Asia. Indeed, there are already signs of coordination on Turkmenistan between Moscow and Beijing.[107]

The third alternative pipeline route for Turkmenistan's energy, and one championed by Washington, is the Trans-Caspian pipeline or TCP idea. This would entail Turkmenistan's agreement to ship oil or gas through pipelines to be built in the Caspian

Sea that would then go on to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, bypassing Russia and Iran. Previously, proposals for this undersea pipeline that would have shipped 16 billion cubic meters (bcm) of Turkmen natural gas to Turkey annually and possibly another 14 bcm a year to Europe collapsed due to disputes over ownership of oil fields in the Caspian and Niyazov's demands for a $1 billion down payment, i.e., bribe, from the international consortium involved.[108] As a result both Azerbaijan and Russia have picked up the slack, leaving Turkmenistan deprived of alternatives to Russia, a situation that Moscow clearly intends to perpetuate.

Recent developments here point in two directions. First, Russian pressure on Turkmenistan to refrain from such projects despite its visible interest in joining it has been intense.[109] On the other hand, also before his death, it now appears clear that Niyazov had made overtures to Azerbaijan for a rapprochement to resume discussions on this pipeline and broached the subject with German Foreign Minister Steinmeyer and the European Union (EU) representative to Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan also agreed to sell Turkey 10 bcm a year of gas, and it could only be through this pipeline or through the Russian pipeline. But the latter case is one in which Turkmenistan would receive only $100 per tcm, not $240 tcm which is the going price.[110]

Niyazov's last successes clearly enhanced Turkmenistan's bargaining position, but not to the degree that the new regime, evidently dependent upon Russian support, actually initiated new proposals for a pipeline along the shore of the Caspian that would connect to Russia's network and all but eliminate the possibility of a trans-Caspian pipeline.[111] During his May 9-15, 2007, visit to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan,

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed major and consequential energy agreements with Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. These deals go far toward consolidating Russia's superior or even monopoly position in Central Asia's oil economy and its recently proclaimed objective of a gas cartel. Not only do these agreements make it extremely difficult for Western (i.e., EU and American) pipeline plans to proceed, they also, if implemented, will consolidate Central Asian governments' overall dependence upon Moscow and Russia's hegemonic status in Central Asia.

Regarding natural gas, the agreements signed during Putin's trip represent Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan's agreement to join with Russia in modernizing an old pipeline and building a new so-called Prikaspiiskoe pipeline, i.e., a pipeline that goes along the shores of the Caspian Sea and will then connect to Gazprom's pipelines. In a related deal, Russia will process gas condensate from Kazakhstan's Karachaganak field in Orenburg and let Kazrosgaz, a joint enterprise of Gazprom and Kazmunaigaz, sell it in Europe.[112] The Prikaspiiskoe deal is, of course, the most critical of those signed, as it appears to tie Turkmenistan's natural gas exports to Russia through 2012, if not after. Building this new pipeline and modernizing existing ones so that Uzbekistan can also join its neighbors and ship gas through the Gazprom network will allow Moscow to purchase up to 80 billion cubic meters from Turkmenistan annually. In addition, the new system should be able, once upgraded, to carry 90 bcm of gas annually beginning in 2012.[113]

The consequences of this deal are immense. First, in the Russian, though not the Turkmen view, this agreement thwarts the projected U.S.-backed plan for a

$10 billion trans-Caspian pipeline that would connect Turkmenistan's gas to a Baku-Erzerum gas pipeline, bypassing Russia and allowing it to market its gas directly to Europe. Speaking of a Trans-Caspian pipeline alternative, Russian spokesmen, like Energy Minister Viktor Khristenko, now claim that the "technological, legal, and ecological risks (not to mention the political ones of Russian resistance—author) are so big that it will be impossible to find an investor unless it is a political investor who does not care how much gas there is to pump through."[114] Second, this deal suggests that Turkmenistan is moving away from neutrality and will, especially if Russian analysts are correct, have no choice but to depend upon Russia for its economic survival.[115] Russian officials and analysts clearly do not believe that Turkmenistan has enough gas of its own to satisfy other customers. Otherwise Khristenko would not have made his statement above. So this deal, which will be finalized in September, will give Russia what it believes to be an unassailable contractual superiority over all other claimants to Turkmen gas.

To be sure, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov disputes this analysis, stating that Turkmenistan remains open to other deals with China, India, the Trans-Caspian pipeline, and foreign companies like Chevron which was welcomed into Turkmenistan just before Putin's trip.[116] But it remains to be seen whether or not he is correct, and equally, if not more importantly, whether there is enough gas to pump to other customers of Turkmenistan like China. The third consequence of these deals is that China, which has a contract for building a pipeline from Turkmenistan for up to 30 bcm annually, starting in 2009, is in danger of being left holding the bag if there is not sufficient gas after exports through Russian

pipelines. In that case, its dependence upon Russia for gas will grow. And since China's experience with Russian energy policy has been a thoroughly dispiriting one full of broken Russian promises, China will essentially be left with two alternatives, either more reliance on Russia or more aggressive efforts to buy gas from other suppliers. Given its past record, it will likely see gas as a strategic asset and seek to tie up long-term supplies, thus buying from politically disreputable suppliers at top dollar, including the Middle East. The political consequences of either alternative are full of risks for U.S.-China relations, given existing American fears of a Sino-Russian alliance against U.S. policy or American fears of China's efforts to "lock up" energy fields abroad in politically suspect states.

While Berdymukhammedov professes that Turkmenistan has more than enough gas for all of its current and intended customers including Pakistan and India, it is unclear if it or Kazakhstan, which likewise maintains that these deals represent pragmatism in action, will come out ahead. Russia, on the other hand, is the clear winner. Thus the fourth significant consequence of this deal is that Russia takes a giant step in alleviating its own gas shortages and allowing Russia to maintain its unquestioned dominance of the European gas market. The secret of its energy success until now has been its ability to compel Central Asians to accept less than world market prices for energy in return for shipping through Russian pipelines. The oil and gas thus acquired not only keeps Central Asia in a state of neo-colonial dependence upon Moscow; it allows Moscow to continue subsidizing domestic consumption in its own wasteful energy economy. Although Russia has begun raising domestic prices because of a prospective gas shortage that became

evident in 2006, thanks to these deals it will be able to sustain its inefficient model and Putin's system at least through 2012 with the energy it will now receive from Central Asia. In the meantime, having negated the possibility of Central Asia selling gas to Europe at global market prices free of Russian interference, Moscow postpones those states' full independence and retains its dominant position in European gas markets.

Fifth, these agreements also represent a giant step in consolidating the gas cartel that Russia and Iran have talked about for the last year.[117] While in fact Iranian and Russian calls for a gas cartel go back to 2001-02, it is only now that the possibility of what Russia deceptively calls "coordination among producers" is coming into sight. These deals alone do not ensure a global gas cartel, if only because none of this gas is liquefied natural gas (LNG), a major alternative to Central Asian and Russian gas. But they also go far toward ensuring that Russia possesses a hegemonic position in global gas markets. These deals not only signify Moscow's continuing drive for a gas cartel, they will also undoubtedly serve as a prelude to or springboard for future Russian efforts to gain sizable, if not controlling market share in LNG production.

The last remaining alternative pipeline route from Turkmenistan is one that Washington has also championed. It is called the TAP or TAPI line because it could send oil or gas south toward the Indian subcontinent and Indian Ocean. This project is still in the discussion stage and faces all the many obstacles to realization that are common to any multilateral energy pipeline deal plus the deterrent to its construction of the war in Afghanistan, unrest in Pakistan, and Indo-Pakistani rivalry. Russia here pressured India

and Pakistan to go with another alternative, an Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline bypassing Turkmenistan. But they refused to do so and have shown renewed interest in the TAP line.[118] Indeed, as of August 2006, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan were in the "final stages" of negotiating this deal with the help of the Asian Development Bank that has consistently championed it. Whereas New Delhi only sought a gas pipeline, the other partners were discussing both gas and oil pipelines to and through Pakistan, a railway track, roads, and a fiber optic system.[119] Nevertheless, these two options are the most effective long-term card available to Washington against Russia's plans to lead a CIS gas cartel and in the struggle to influence both the succession and the new leadership's subsequent policies. And just before Niyazov died, there were signs of renewed interest among all the parties to the TAPI line in moving it forward and making Afghanistan an energy bridge to the South.[120] The TAP and TAPI lines, along with similar proposals concerning provision of more Central Asian electric power to India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, are also part of the broader American strategy to undermine Russian efforts at consolidating an energy monopoly over Central Asia by reorienting at least some of Central Asia's energy flows southward.[121]

Therefore Russia's most immediate and perhaps most critical objective over the long-term is to ensure that Turkmenistan cannot and does not achieve diversification of gas pipeline outlets to other markets. This entails:

(1) Reaching a delimitation of the Caspian Sea among all the littoral states of that sea that ensures Russia's ability to utilize the largest possible share of the sea for its own exploration of energy and other

purposes. The obstacles here have primarily been Iran, as described below, and Turkmenistan. Thus a truly pro-Russian regime in Ashgabat may well come round to Russia's position here, isolating Iran on this issue when it can ill afford to estrange Russia.

Russia, on the other hand, has agreed to the principle of apportioning shares based on the length of each country's coastline, an idea which the remaining countries basically support and which Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have supported since independence. Under Russia's proposal, Kazakhstan would end up with 29 percent, while Iran would receive about 14 percent. Russia would secure about 19 percent of the sea's area. Although dividing the sea into national sectors—as opposed to sharing resources equally—would mean Russia would not be able to profit from the larger deposits off the coast of Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan, it still has deposits in the northern Caspian. At the same time, Russia counts on profiting by transporting and processing oil from other states. In practice, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia have bilaterally settled their maritime boundaries, implying that the northern Caspian is basically demarcated, and the principle of division of the seabed of the Caspian into national sectors is basically accepted. The major obstacle to a final agreement is Iran.[122]

(2) Preventing the construction of a Trans-Caspian pipeline that would connect to the BTC pipeline and allow Turkmenistan to send oil or gas freely to global markets. An agreement concerning the seabed of the Caspian, if not its waters that prevents such construction, would connect this objective to the preceding one.[123]

Thus Russia insists that any pipeline under the Caspian Sea would create massive ecological damage, something it normally does not care about, and that

any such pipeline by anyone must be ratified by all five littoral members, a ploy that would give it a veto over all future pipeline projects there.[124] Russia knows that any such pipeline undermines Russian efforts at monopoly over Central Asian energy pipelines and integrates the users of that pipeline more closely to Western markets and defense organizations.[125] Furthermore, to the extent that Central Asians have options other than Russian pipelines for exporting their gas and oil, they can do so and charge world market prices instead of being victimized by Russia, which uses their oil and gas at below market prices to subsidize Russian domestic consumption and to prevent them from competing with Russia.[126] Indeed, it has long been known that Moscow seeks to suppress Central Asian energy independence lest it compete with and drive Russian oil and gas out of the market.[127] Therefore it is not surprising that Kazakh politicians have openly voiced an interest in joining the BTC pipeline in order to avoid excessive dependence upon Russia.[128]

Turkmenistan has duly frequently adopted inflexible positions and clashed with Russia and Azerbaijan over oil fields and pipelines in the Caspian Sea and its delimitation.[129] Even now the discord over each state's border in the Caspian obstructs prospects for pipeline construction and freezes that sea in its posture of mutual tensions among littoral states. Although Moscow has sought to get around this discord by signing bilateral agreements with littoral states, this is at best only a partial solution to the problems with demarcating the Caspian, as Turkmenistan and Iran are still holding out.

However, Russia's interests in winning Turkmenistan to its "solar system" in Central Asia go beyond these important pipeline issues. Obviously

Russia is using all of the means at its disposal to thwart Kazakh and Turkmen participation in the BTC or in other U.S. pipeline projects. But it has other critical interests in the Caspian that cannot be overlooked in any discussion of Turkmenistan's future. These interests include preventing any Turkmen military connection with the West, and particularly the United States, beyond its existing membership in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This means preventing the appearance of a U.S. base there or Turkmen participation in American sponsored programs such as those taking place with Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan under the rubric of Operation CASPIAN GUARD and other bilateral agreements among these states. These goals hold for Moscow even if one assumes that restoring or invigorating Russo-Turkmen military cooperation will be difficult.[130]

These U.S. programs aim to strengthen local capabilities for radar surveillance of the Caspian coast, defense of oil platforms, counterproliferation, border patrol, and, of course, ultimately these states' defense sovereignty and capability. Instead, Russia wants all the littoral states to join a Russian proposed Caspian Force (CASFOR) that would dominate the Caspian Sea, exclude nonlittoral states, and act as a formula for Russian domination of the entire Caspian Sea. This initiative has been a major objective of Russian diplomacy in 2005-06 directed towards all the littoral states of the Caspian Sea and one that Turkmenistan had stood aloof from under Niyazov's policy of absolute neutrality.[131]

Turkmenistan under Niyazov pursued a defense policy of pure unilateralism that frustrated many of Moscow's policies. For example, a study of

Turkmenistan's defense policies notes that,

> A powerful impetus for the leadership of Turkmenistan to augment its military potential is the events in Afghanistan and the likelihood that a military campaign will be waged against Iran, as well as conflicts associated with access to Caspian Sea oil. The Caspian basin, rich in accumulations of hydrocarbons, has made the relationships among the nations with access to it much more complex. Recall that Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkmenistan have had quite strained relations to this day with regard to drawing the boundaries across the waters of the Caspian Sea. . . . Despite the "advance of the standards of democracy," a reliance on the armed forces will be part of the consciousness of local leaders for a very long time to come. The possibility of a "color revolution" in Turkmenistan occupies a quite important place on the list of possible threats.[132]

Russia obviously wants Turkmenistan to move over time towards joining both the Eurasian Economic Community and Collective Security Treaty Organization and thus abandon its former neutrality by joining these Russian-organized economic and security blocs, ultimately including as well the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. However, doing so would effectively curtail, if not undermine, much of Turkmenistan's sovereignty. As part of this drive, Moscow now also demands a veto power over other CIS members' defense ties to the West. In 2005 Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov has stated that "The countries of the region are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). And [if the countries of the region are] making a decision about hosting new bases on their territory, they should take into account the interests of Russia and coordinate this decision with our country."[133] Similarly, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov threatened supposedly "disloyal" (Lavrov's

term) governments in the CIS with the use of "every conceivable economic pressure tactics."[134]

These policy initiatives are part of a larger pattern of activities that observers have discerned and which point to intensified Russian efforts to create more effective trade and defense organizations in the CIS under its auspices and consolidate its hegemonic position there. Russia's activities in regard to the Caspian Sea play an important role in this project but have received scant attention in the West. Although the original idea for a CASFOR evidently dates back to 2002, since April 2005 Russia has repeatedly advocated an international naval task force or operations group in the Caspian called CASFOR.[135] Putin set up this task force or rapid reaction force allegedly to defend against terrorism, arms trafficking, drug running, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) components there, and supposedly modeled it after the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization's BLACKSEAFOR (Black Sea Force). Even so, CASFOR is to be planned as a conventional naval force that does not appear to be appropriate to the missions Moscow proposes.

This has led observers to suspect that Russia intends to subsume the fledgling naval forces of Central Asian states, set up to guard their coastal installations, within a Russian command structure and prevent them from obtaining Western support for developing their own defense capabilities. Moscow also hopes thereby to consolidate its dominant position in the Caspian and, in the continuing discussions on the ultimate disposition of its waters by agreement among the littoral states, making the proposed CASFOR an intended instrument of Russian hegemony in Central Asia. Third, Russia wants to enhance its CIS organization, the CSTO, so

that the SCO, which it regards as largely a Chinese initiative, does not have the sole prerogative of helping Central Asian states to defend themselves.[136] One way of doing this is to tie Central Asian defense sectors to Moscow by continuing to sell them weapons at subsidized prices in return for equity in key Soviet–era defense installations. There are some indicators that Putin may have tried to persuade Niyazov to agree to deals along this line at their January 2006 meetings.[137]

Russia also has moved strongly to include the other littoral states in its proposed CASFOR. Moscow has advocated that Iran join this organization, and Tehran has apparently assented to this invitation.[138] Iran's fears about the proximity of U.S. military forces are no less intense, and this may explain its support for the proposal. Lavrov duly indicated that CASFOR would be used to prevent proliferation of sensitive materials usable in nuclear weapons. Given Russian proliferation to Iran, this ludicrous and hypocritical statement gives the game away.

Lavrov also traveled to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in 2005 to strengthen Russia's regional position in the Caspian. He secured Niyazov's assent not to build foreign military bases without first notifying Russia, a key aim of Russian foreign policy as demanded by Ivanov above. Lavrov also successfully narrowed the gaps between Ashgabat's and Moscow's views on Caspian delimitation and won support for the banning of foreign flights over Turkmenistan's airspace containing WMD components and missiles. Lavrov also invited Turkmen officials to a working group meeting on this future CASFOR to include military contingents from all the littoral states.[139] So we can expect continued Russian pressures to reach a delimitation of the Caspian along the lines it wants, and

the exclusion of all foreign forces from the Caspian.[140] This pressure along all these aforementioned lines will continue so as to reduce and eventually terminate Turkmenistan's neutrality and duly create closed economic and defense blocs in Central Asia.

Thus we can see that Moscow's Central Asian policies as a whole, not just to Turkmenistan or in regard to gas, are frankly neo-colonialist, aiming at a condition of diminished sovereignty for those states in both defense and economic policy. Grozin frankly outlined Russia's approach to energy issues with Central Asian States. He told the Rosbalt news agency in 2005 that:

> For successful economic cooperation with Russia exploration and extraction of oil and Russia's expansion into the nutrition and light industry sectors of the Uzbek market [to take] place, then one can say that that the Russian state has received what it expected from the [Russo-Uzbek treaty of November 2005] alliance treaty.[141]

Elsewhere Grozin admits that Russia's neo-imperial policies are in many respects against economic logic, although they make excellent geopolitical sense from an imperial perspective. Thus he writes,

> The changes on the world market might force the Russian Federation to start importing uranium instead of exporting it. This may happen in the relatively near future. For this reason, the uranium of Kazakhstan and its products are of special interest for Russia, while bilateral cooperation in the atomic, space research, and other high tech applied spheres might pull all the other branches along with them. Russia does not profit financially from its relations with Kazakhstan, which have nothing to do with altruism: financial input is accepted as payment for Russia's geopolitical interests and national security.

> This is a long-term strategy that allows the Republic of Kazakhstan to adjust its nearly entire scientific and technical potential to Russia: Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are two key Central Asian states. This strategy also applies to the military-technical sphere—Moscow sells its resources for "allied" prices not only to strengthen military and foreign policy contacts with Kazakhstan, but also tie it, for many years to come, to Russia's military-industrial complex and standards.[142]

Under the circumstances, a Turkmen surrender to Russian dictates therefore promises neither stability nor prosperity, and no security to Ashgabat or probably to its neighbors if they are similarly situated.

Iran.

The second country that has vital interests in Turkmenistan is Iran. Tehran's interests in Turkmenistan are fundamentally strategic and only secondly commercial. There are signs that the current administration of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sees itself threatened by a comprehensive U.S. policy of strategic encirclement, including U.S. efforts to obtain bases and influence in Caspian littoral states. As one assessment from 2005 of Iranian policy argues,

> The distinct character of Ahmadinejad's administration arises from its full alertness on security issues. Due to the lingering turbulence and riots in Iraq, Saudi accusation of Iran against its role in Iraq, the colored revolutions in its northern theater of Central Asia and the Caucasus, and also more frequent domestic turbulences in its border provinces such as Khuzestan and Kurdistan, the Islamic Republic is ostensibly panic[ked] over the possibility of the threats in favor of regime change, formulated in terms of Iran's nuclear technology.[143]

Accordingly, Iran will strive mightily to prevent the establishment of a pro-Western or pro-American regime in Turkmenistan or anywhere else in Central Asia and the Caucasus because it fears that such a regime might prove amenable to American influence and possibly U.S. military presence there either ostensibly for Afghanistan or actually directed against Iran. Ahmadinejad has even gone so far as to state, upon his return from the 2005 conference of the Organization of Islamic Countries, that "The most critical decision of the Summit was ratification of a legal act to proclaim the invasion of any Islamic country as an instance of invading the collective bodies of Islamic community. This provision has paved the way for a collective security pact amongst the Muslim states to defend the territorial integrity of all parties involved."[144] This latter possibility is also anathema for Russia, which is trying to establish its own exclusive domination of the entire Central Asian military theater, including the Caspian Sea.

Iran's policies towards Turkmenistan must be understood in the context of its larger policies toward the other non-Russian Caspian littoral states. After Russia, Iran has more at stake here than any other foreign power. Iran has the means, if it so chose, to threaten Turkmenistan, but it also needs to ensure that Turkmenistan does not flirt with its enemies. So it must offer Turkmenistan inducements to refrain from displays of pro-Americanism. Iran too seeks a more favorable division of the Caspian Sea and, like Turkmenistan, has been the major obstacle to multilateral agreement on this issue. Certainly it wants to be recognized as a major Caspian power, even if it must rely upon Russian protection. Consequently, there is always an undertone of suspicion of both

American and Russian objectives and policy in the Caspian despite this dependence upon Russia, or maybe because of it.[145] Iranian officials have made it clear that they want Washington to regard it as a "big regional power," and this vision clearly spans the Caspian littoral.[146]

In the spring of 2001 General Mohammed Salimi, the commander of the Iranian armed forces, publicly warned that the Islamic Republic stood ready to respond militarily to Western interference in Caspian affairs. Subsequently, in a blatant display of gunboat diplomacy, Iran menaced neighboring Azerbaijan over disputed energy sources, leading to the effective—albeit temporary—pullout of several Western multinational oil companies from the region. Since then, Iran has increased its potential for troublemaking. Already boasting the second largest fleet in the Caspian (after Russia's), Iran's naval assets have grown substantially in the last several years. According to Western intelligence estimates, Iran now bases about one-third of its entire navy—some 65 ships, including 8 surface combat vessels, 1 submarine, and 56 small patrol boats—in the Caspian. Tehran, however, hopes to expand this Caspian contingent still further. In April 2004, Iranian Naval commander Rear Admiral Abbas Mohtaj announced his country's plans for a new naval squadron for the region, complete with warships, supply craft, Russian-made *Kilo*-class submarines, mini-subs, and additional marine detachments. Even more ominously, Western officials believe that Iran is now working on a new basing mode for its ballistic missile arsenal, and will soon deploy a range of short- and medium-range missiles aboard cargo vessels stationed in the Caspian.[147] Since then, Iran has also committed itself to a buildup of it Caspian commercial

fleet to enhance its commercial presence in the Caspian Sea.[148]

Similarly, according to Anthony Cordesman's recent survey of Iranian military capabilities, Iran is currently undergoing the buildup cited above and is developing a capability for asymmetric warfare in the Caspian Sea and its littoral which could involve both its regular armed force and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) or Pasdaran, and comprise both raids or amphibious operations in the Caspian littoral as well as the Gulf. As Cordesman writes, Iran's naval and other forces seen in the regional context can conduct limited or unconventional warfare, threaten traffic through the Gulf (or the Caspian Sea) and could threaten or intimidate Iran's neighbors.[149] Cordesman's observations about Iran's air force, though focused on Gulf scenarios, should also be read with the possibility of a Caspian contingency in mind.

Iran is slowly improving its capability for joint land-air and sea-air operations. Iranian exercises and statements provide strong indications that Iran would like to develop an advanced air defense system, the ability to operate effectively in long-range maritime patrol and attack missions, effective joint warfare capabilities, and strike/attack forces with the ability to penetrate deep into Iraq, the Southern Gulf states, and other neighboring powers. Iran's exercises, military literature, and procurement efforts also make it clear that its air planners understand the value of airborne early warning and command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C4I) systems; remotely piloted vehicles; and airborne refueling. Iran has even sought to create its own satellite program. Further, the air force's efforts at sheltering and dispersal indicate that it understands the vulnerability of modern

air facilities and the standoff attack capabilities of advanced air forces like those of the United States.[150]

Obviously none of Iran's Caspian neighbors except Russia even remotely approximates its capabilities and that fact alone might serve to deter them from hosting U.S. bases on their territory for use against Iran. But if those capabilities did not suffice to deter them; then the possibility of Iranian-backed insurgency or terror operations in Central Asia and the Caucasus, such as those alluded to above, would not be difficult for Iran to coordinate given its ties to international terrorists like Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and even al-Qaeda.[151] Certainly there have been persistent reports of Iranian underground activities, particularly in Tajikistan and Azerbaijan.[152] But beyond that, there is considerable evidence that Iran is building up networks or relationships among Transcaucasian, Central Asian, and Afghan insurgents and terrorists that could be activated in the future to threaten those governments or American interests or bases there.[153]

At the same time, it also is clear that Iran's actual attitude toward the groups that it sponsors is wholly instrumental. Although they are maintained and kept on hand for when they may be needed, they are not activated until and unless Iran's relationship with one of the neighboring states, either in the Middle East or in the former Soviet Union, deteriorates. Moreover, the closer a country is to Iran's borders, the less likely is Iran to let its hand be seen in fomenting insurgency, particularly if Russia is on the other side of that country's borders. Thus if covert or overt support for such groups jeopardizes critical security relationships like that of Tehran with Moscow, then those groups are shelved as has happened in Tajikistan.[154]

Thus Iran need not activate either its conventional or

unconventional capabilities in order to secure tangible benefits in its diplomacy and defense policy. These capabilities are always on view, so to speak, or in the room with Iranian officials when they try to persuade Iran's neighbors not to join with America. For example, in 1992 Russian authorities already understood that they needed to continue providing Iran with conventional weapons (if not more dangerous dual-use technology) lest Iran make trouble for Moscow in Central Asia and the Caucasus, a perception that continues until today.[155] In 1994 Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev confirmed that the sale of weapons and nuclear components occurred on condition that Iran renounced the possession of nuclear weapons and support for the expansion of Islamic fundamentalism "of the extremist sort" into Central Asia.[156] Likewise, it is quite clear that it would not be difficult for Iran to threaten Azerbaijan or Turkmenistan with force if it so chose.[157] Clearly Iran's combined conventional and unconventional capabilities represent a formidable regional deterrent against potential U.S. or NATO interests in placing their forces in and around the Caspian littoral.

IRAN'S DIPLOMACY OF SMILES AND ENERGY

But Iran's ability to influence its neighbors to the north does not depend exclusively on its ability or willingness to threaten their vital interests. While its conventional weapons and deployable terrorist and insurgent groups are always on the table, they rarely are brandished publicly among Iran's neighbors. It suffices for everyone to know that Iran possesses and could easily employ these instruments of power if necessary. But in its day-to-day conduct of relations with its neighbors, Iran is evidently following a strategy

that has developed since about 2001-02 when it tried to use force to suppress Azeri oil barges in the Caspian that it regarded with hostility. However, Iran merely provoked an open show of Russia's determination to assert its military force in the Caspian Sea and Turkish and American military support for Azerbaijan.

Since then, a smile offensive has been the order of the day in Iranian strategy. That strategy comprises a comprehensive program of high-level exchanges with its Trans-Caucasian and Central Asian neighbors, including Afghanistan, and the invocation of major trade, transportation, and energy deals in order to create allies for Iran there.[158] These deals encompass oil, gas, and electricity because not only do some of those states depend on imports, Iran, too, faces an energy crisis due to its lack of refining capacity.[159] It also has had to reduce oil production due to aging technology and the inability to obtain funding abroad, thanks to U.S. pressure.[160] Thus, while Iran subsidizes its domestic consumption, it must also import energy products from its neighbors like Turkmenistan, even as it exports to states like Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia who all depend on foreign energy sources.[161] The point of this strategy is to create enduring political and economic ties so that its northern neighbors, including Turkey, will think twice before allowing America to deploy any form of military power to the Caspian region lest those states lose valuable political and economic ties with Iran. Indeed, Iran has shown that where its trading partner is more dependent than it is upon trade, it is perfectly willing to use it as a weapon to punish failure to support it on the nuclear issue.[162] Similarly, if Iran is sanctioned, they could also then be affected.[163]

Meanwhile, these ties include talk of joint cooperation against terrorism with Turkey; provision of energy

to Armenia, Georgia, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan (including electricity); and importing of energy from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.[164] That Tajikistan and Kazakhstan have plentiful uranium sources is also a matter of concern to Western intelligence sources.[165] Indeed, there have been reports that Iran is using middlemen in Armenia and Azerbaijan to gather expertise in nuclear and missile technology throughout the former Soviet Union. This effort allegedly comprises over 200 front companies, government offices, and academic institutions that supposedly engage in "weapons research."[166] In the meantime, these negotiations or deals with regional governments also can involve calls for defense cooperation with Azerbaijan, or for creation of regional security blocs with all of the Transcaucasian states, including Turkey and Russia, as a way of excluding U.S. influence from the area or enhancing regional security with states like Tajikistan.[167]

This diplomatic offensive has continued since 2001 to the present, but its main points were already outlined in an article in the Iranian newspaper *Qods* on September 8, 2001. Despite the tremendous turns in world politics that began only 3 days later, this program of action and its goals have remained in effect since then. Writing about then Foreign Minister Kharrazi's visits to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan only 2 months after Iran had fired on British ships looking for Azeri energy deposits in the Caspian Sea, correspondent Jamshir Afshar observed that,

> In effect, Iran's foreign policy has always stressed on cooperation to establish peace, stability, security, and economic expansion in Central Asia and Iran has always made an effort to achieve this goal. Based on this principle, and in an effort to expand strategic cooperation

with the region's nations (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, Iran has always encouraged and promoted regional cooperation. This was so much so that cooperation, coordination, and the shared views that Iran had with these countries led to the establishment of peace and national reconciliation in Tajikistan. Along the same lines Iran is against the presence of foreigners in Central Asia and has stressed the need to provide for the region's security and progress by the region's countries themselves. In this midst there are countries that have tried in the past decade to favor the West and the United States. This shows that changing the economic and security structure in the region will only be possible with the political will and the independence of the peoples and the governments of the region. Iran has historic and cultural relations with Central Asia. So far, it has played and proven its role as an ally and a secure partner. Iran believes that the countries' resources could complement one another. Iran and Central Asia could revive the Silk Road. At the same time Iran could be one of the most important routes of communications and the transport of Central Asia's resources to the rest of the world. It could provide the best facilities and equipment and it is ready to help with all its might in this area. In any case, despite Iran's eagerness to expand relations with Central Asian nations, the two sides have not been able to take advantage of one another's capabilities for the benefit of all concerned. Even though these relations are expanding in the area of politics, the trend for expansion of bilateral economic relations has continued slowly. The total volume of Iran's exports to Central Asia is 4 percent of the total capacity of that market and stands at $870 Million. Meanwhile Iran has the relative advantage of connecting land routes and could connect these nations to the warm waters of the Persian Gulf and ultimately the lucrative economic markets in Southeast Asia. The most important aspect of Iran's proximity to Central Asian countries is that it is thought to have enough capability with regard to the export and import of goods.[168]

Since then, Iranian governments have spared no effort to augment both the political and economic ties binding it to Central Asia and the Transcaucasus, using all the economic levers at its disposal as well as the promise of support for political objectives, such as hinting to Azerbaijan that it might support its cause against Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh and expand defense cooperation with it and saying similar things to Armenia.[169] These diplomatic and economic initiatives coexist with the cultivation and development of capabilities that could threaten neighboring states and must be seen as key elements of a strategy that has successfully deterred local governments (with considerable assistance from Russia) from thinking of allowing U.S. forces to use their lands in the event of a military contingency against Iran. These countries' proximity to Iran, vulnerability to Iranian threats, and benefits from cooperation with Tehran limit any hope Washington and/or its allies might have of using them to strike at Iran should that become the only way to deal with Tehran's nuclear proliferation.

Iran's policy towards Turkmenistan must be understood within the policy framework outlined above. Certainly it could ill afford to estrange the mercurial Niyazov, but Ahmadinejad's fiery rhetoric in 2005 appeared to do so. Evidently Niyazov let it be known in Moscow that relations with Iran had deteriorated so Iran had every reason to restore good ties to Turkmenistan.[170] Therefore, in July 2006 Ahmadinejad came to Ashgabat and negotiated a series of agreements with Turkmenistan and Niyazov. The most important of these deals centered on security, the bilateral oil and gas trade, and economic partnership. Both sides paid special attention to the issue of delimiting the Caspian Sea in order to develop its hydrocarbon resources.

And they also discussed selling gas to Europe.[171] So it appears that they still oppose the Russian proposal for demarcating the Caspian. In their communiqué, the two states called for a new summit of Caspian littoral states in Tehran to boost trade, economic and energy cooperation, possibly referring to this issue by implication. They affirmed mutual support for peace, stability, and noninterference in each other's domestic affairs, and of most importance to Iran, they stated that "The sides will not allow [anyone] to use their territories against each other."[172]

Undoubtedly Iran's interests in the Turkmen succession are going to be directed towards consolidating and preserving those gains which it had made with Niyazov, e.g., on Caspian demarcation, energy sales, and continuing to ensure that no American presence emerges that can threaten its security. Perhaps for this reason the Turkmen opposition has charged that Iran was selling Turkmenistan weapons even before Niyazov died.[173] And it will also seek advantageous energy deals with Turkmenistan to facilitate its own energy security and that of Turkmenistan.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM RUSSIA, CHINA, AND IRAN

For these reasons, we will likely see concerted efforts by Tehran, Beijing, and Moscow to prevent the emergence of a pro-Western leadership that could undermine any of these states' security and economic interests. The two key interests here are the continuation of Turkmenistan's pipeline dependence upon Moscow and refusal to support American military presence. Their efforts to uphold those objectives will include gun running and training, side payments in the form of

bribes, the use of political subversion and intelligence penetration carried out in tandem with the Russian police organizations, government, and energy firms, and a willingness, if necessary, to dispatch military force in return for adhesion to Russian-sponsored defense and security organizations in Central Asia.

But most of all, we will see these states' willingness to back a successor, anoint him with their blessing, and confer legitimacy and power upon him by signing or continuing energy deals with him, even if they must pay more for the gas than before. These "side payments" not just to Moscow's man but to his retinue will include defense protection—and here we should not overlook that Uzbekistan has granted Russia access to the Navoi airfield in case of emergencies, facilitating Russian capabilities to move forces into the area--including the possible airlifting of troops in a violent showdown, bribes, assurances that this man and retinue's position will be guaranteed by Russia and the other two states, and more favorable energy terms than before, particularly with regard to the price paid for energy.[174]

In return, he will be expected to reject new pipeline alternatives that do not go through Russia with the possible exception of the already ongoing contracts with China. He can also be expected to come under pressure to renounce neutrality and join the panoply of Russian security organizations CIS, EEC, the CSTO, CASFOR, and membership in the SCO. This ruler can also be expected to come under intense pressure to reject the TAP line and any idea of a U.S. military presence in Turkmenistan or assistance to its naval and ground forces with regard to the Caspian Sea.

None of this means, however, that Russia's initial candidate will be successful, but it does suggest that

Moscow is already off the mark in maneuvering to get its man into power. The fact that Turkmenistan essentially closed its borders and foreign communications and mobilized its forces upon Niyazov's death underscores its surviving elite's own uncertainty and insecurity because it clearly fears popular unrest. Russia's initial statement by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov that it wants to see a lawful succession take place suggests that Berdymukhammedov's ascension, which has been challenged as being extra-legal—may not have been its preferred alternative. Alternatively, it is signaling that it wants his succession ratified in a form that can plausibly be defended as being legal. But what Russia most wants for the immediate period is calm and predictability, not violence. This suggests that Moscow may not be fully confident in its ability to control the situation there, active though it may be in maneuvering for the succession. This conforms to the opinion of Dr. Murat Esenov, the editor-in-chief of the Sweden-based *Journal of Central Asia and the Caucasus*, and an ethnic Turkmen who has published widely about the country. Esenov observed that "I don't see any big players pressuring for change as long as there is stability." He said, "They prefer stability in Turkmenistan."[175]

So while they may seek stability and move cautiously at first, there is little doubt that the great powers will be acting to ensure that their interests prevail. There is little doubt that a major asset will be the ability to influence control over energy. This was Niyazov's trump card, and it may prove to be decisive for whoever comes out on top. Undoubtedly there will be a scramble for control over those resources because energy contracts were under Niyazov's personal control, and their legality may come into question.[176]

Obviously there was some concern in Moscow immediately after his death that those contracts were in jeopardy. Berdymukhammedov's statements that the contracts would be honored seemed to have allayed these fears for now. And in any case, if the new regime had invalidated those contracts, the cash it got for gas would have been cut off at once, leaving the government essentially bankrupt.[177]

Still, it remains most likely that control over these resources and the disbursement of energy rents and over the instruments of force will be decisive. Certainly control over energy will be a powerful source of presidential patronage and largesse for the incoming elite whose main interest is survival and then rent-seeking through control over financial flows accruing to officials. At the same time, the absence of reliable, verifiable independent information about Turkmenistan makes political prognoses largely a guessing game.

AMERICAN OPTIONS

Although Turkmenistan and Central Asia are vital for Russia, Iran, and China, it is increasingly important to Washington. In 2004, for example, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage told a Kazakh audience that "stability in the area is of paramount importance and vital national interest."[178] Moreover, it is not implausible that some local governments might fail. As Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte reported to Congress in 2006,

> Central Asia remains plagued by political stagnation and repression, rampant corruption, widespread poverty, and widening socio-economic inequalities, and other problems that nurture radical sentiment and terrorism.

> In the worst, but not implausible, case, central authority in one or more of these states could evaporate as rival clans or regions vie for power—opening the door to an expansion of terrorist and criminal activity on the model of failed states like Somalia and, when it was under Taliban rule, Afghanistan.[179]

Negroponte's successor, Vice Admiral (Ret) J. Michael McConnell, was, if anything, perhaps more pessimistic in his testimony in 2007. He said that,

> There is no guarantee that elite and societal turmoil across Central Asia will stay within the confines of existing autocratic systems. In the worst, but not implausible case, central authority in one or more of these states could evaporate as rival political factions, clans or regions vie for power—opening the door to a dramatic expansion of terrorist and criminal activity along the lines of a failed state.[180]

Turkmenistan certainly falls into that category described by Negroponte and McConnell. Yet even though America has fewer direct interests in Turkmenistan than do the other major powers, Central Asia and Turkmenistan are important because of their geographical location and major energy holdings. Negroponte's analysis suggests that should violence or a failed state break out in Turkmenistan due to the failure of the succession to resolve basic issues of state organization, then this violence will not remain contained to Turkmenistan and could put U.S. interests at risk. Nevertheless, America is not interested in expanding its military presence in Central Asia, quite the opposite. As General John Abizaid, who was then Combatant Commander of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) stated, America intends to reduce that presence as the level of other forms of cooperation

with local governments grow.[181]

Paradoxically, the fact that America has less immediately at stake in Turkmenistan than do its rivals duly presents it with opportunities to improve relations and advance toward certain strategic objectives as stated above and to work to ward off possibilities of state failure or civil violence.[182] First, it must be understood that American policy towards Turkmenistan cannot succeed if its version of democratization tops the agenda. That objective is not simply realizable at any time in the foreseeable future and pushing it in advance of the establishment of mutual trust between Washington and Ashgabat only inflames Turkmen suspicions of our intentions and goals. Neither is the Turkmen state either disposed to listen to what it takes as misguided U.S. sermons or in any condition to advance towards that goal, even if it wanted to.[183]

While U.S. policies ought to aim at reducing the economic and police pressure upon the population and at providing the kinds of social services and counternarcotics assistance that the new regime has called for, a realistic assessment of Turkmenistan will soon grasp that a considerable period of stability that allows it to become a true state, not a Central Asian hermit kingdom, is essential if it is to make any sort of progress towards any kind of legitimate political order. Certainly we should seek the release of political prisoners and alleviation of their conditions, but demands for major political reform prior to delivering on socio-economic reform will not advance any of our interests there. Turkmenistan will only listen to an American message when it believes America is a credible friend and will not listen to our political sermons beforehand. Toward that end, a long period of stability and gradually increasing prosperity is

essential. Furthermore, the conditions that are necessary for democracy as Americans understand the term are utterly lacking in Turkmenistan. They must and can only be introduced from within, not from above or by force. So we must work with Turkmenistan, not for it or try to lecture to it.

Although this argument will disappoint, if not anger, the exile community and the professional human rights community, it is not one confined only to analysts sitting outside of Central Asia. European Union (EU) Special Representative Pierre Morel evidently shares this view.[184] Yevgeny Zhovtis, Director of the Kazakh International Human Rights Bureau, has also observed that the opposition has little or no support within Turkmenistan and cannot command major power support for democracy.[185] This assessment obviously contradicts that of the exiled opposition which expects Washington to aid human rights, their hoped for takeover of the government, and chastises Washington when it fails to pursue those policies.[186] But that does not change the basic fact that the work of democratization in Turkmenistan is going to be the work of decades, if not generations.

Added to these factors on the ground, most painfully illustrated in Iraq, is that neither Washington nor its European allies have a coherent and viable strategy for democratization in Muslim countries. America's interventionist strategy in Iraq has led to a disaster, and previous experiences of nation-building like those in Haiti, and South Vietnam have not been successful either. While in some cases there has been success like El Salvador, there is no blueprint for success. Neither can it be assured that American aid to those forces that could guarantee internal security, needed as it might be, will lead to democratization. The record of such

outcomes is too uncertain to be invoked as a guarantee of democratization.[187]

We do not know what tactics or strategy lead to the optimal outcome or how to build foreign democracies from above or outside. It is unlikely that Washington has much leverage on local governments with regard to democratization, which those governments regard as a threat to their power and where they see the only alternative to democratization as Islamic fundamentalists. Thus they believe that Washington must support them, lest Islamic extremists supplant them. They also know they can turn to Russia and China for support and aid, and are all too aware of the legacy of examples of American loss of interest and disengagement from protracted transitions to democracy.[188] Turkmenistan exemplifies the difficulties of stage-managing democratic transformation from outside. Indeed, before Niyazov's death, it was revealed that American officials had essentially given up on him and were concentrating on Post-Niyazov scenarios.[189]

However, this is not a recommendation for passivity, rather for a genuinely enlightened realism and doing what can and must be done now in order to do more later. Nothing stated here means that we cannot press steadily over time for what may be called a humanitarian and liberalizing agenda rather than political and economic democratization, strictly speaking. Based on what Nurmuhammed Hamanov, Founding Chairman of the Republican Party of Turkmenistan and an exile from his country has written,

> Priorities for a democratically elected government during the initial post-Niyazov reconstruction must be to release all political prisoners; conduct open tenders and allow Western companies to bid for a stake in developing

> Turkmenistan's oil and gas fields; to consider new ways of getting our gas and oil to Western markets; to restore private property that Niyazov confiscated from Turkmen citizens; and to create a reconstruction fund using Niyazov's personal bank accounts and proceeds from the sale of oil and gas to revive the health-care and education systems.[190]

Even assuming that this is an agenda that merits American support, it must be understood that it is also a long-term one that cannot be accomplished in a short time and against strong internal and international pressure. Nonetheless, it or at least elements of it—e.g., releasing political prisoners, increasing economic transparency, and relieving social hardships—provide a baseline against which to measure progress towards the ends outlined in U.S. policy statements about Central Asia.

Under the circumstances, U.S. policymakers need to assess what their goals are for Turkmenistan with regard to its remaining neutral or aligning with one or another power; the importance to Washington of the BTC and TAP or TAPI pipelines; the significance of any Caspian participation in U.S.-aided defense projects concerning the Caspian littoral; and, critically, the extent to which the country will open access to U.S. investments in energy, related fields, and ultimately other industries. It is also essential to identify those players who would be receptive to our interests and help them find their way into power and influence in Turkmenistan while trying to provide for a balanced and stable arrangement that does not let the succession struggle degenerate into violence. This probably means leaning against Moscow, Beijing, and Tehran, but they almost certainly regard us a priori as enemies and regard not just American political influence but

its democratic ideology as a mortal threat. It also is equally important that we encourage others to work with us or forge a line that commands support among such players as key European states, India, and international financial institutions. Similarly, the readiness to provide military assistance but only as requested for the limited aims that we now have there should be stressed, along with the readiness to move forward on the TAP line and greater Central Asian projects outlined in Secretary Rice's statements and State Department documents.

Specifically, this means that U.S. diplomatic objectives should work toward opening Turkmenistan to fewer police pressures, moves towards more stable administration with a truly functioning state apparatus that encompass steps towards greater control over the police and Ministry of Interior forces, and the opening up of the country toward foreign competition on an equal basis. Key diplomatic and economic objectives also must be the encouragement of Turkmenistan's new rulers to consider favorably the possibility of joining the BTC pipeline and making progress towards the TAP line.

There also is no doubt that the American position regarding pipelines is one that should coincide with the Turkmen government's new interests in maximizing commercial benefit and avoiding a Russian monopoly, even though they themselves want to own Turkmenistan's pipelines.[191] Therefore, Washington should lose no opportunity to point out this harmony of interests. On the other hand, Washington should not adopt a position on the Caspian Sea's demarcation, especially one that opposes both Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. But since the Azeri and Kazakh regimes support the present proposal for division by coastal

share, we should not oppose Turkmenistan's decision to support that proposal if it comes about. Continuing uncertainty only holds back investment in energy and in the greater Caspian area more generally. Moreover, stabilization of the Caspian along this line marks a major defeat for Iran. Indeed, given current trends, Iran is the big loser in the Caspian since no major investment in pipelines or exploration in its share of the Caspian appears to be forthcoming. Consequently, Tehran's intransigence on this issue looks more and more like a self-defeating posture.[192] Therefore, and especially in view of the recent Russo-Turkmen-Kazakh deals, Washington should make every effort to assist U.S. energy firms to explore in Turkmenistan, discover the additional gas that Berdymukhammedov believes is there, and work to facilitate decisions for alternative pipelines rather than strictly to Russia.

In regard to the TAP line, since the Asian Development Bank (ADB) strongly supports it, Washington could do worse than to foster more support from the ADB and to work to remove the political difficulties among India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan towards greater energy collaboration. This also means, of course, a comprehensive effort to stabilize Afghanistan internally and rebuff the growing tide of Taliban attacks there. But Washington should also be providing economic and humanitarian assistance while reminding the new rulers of Turkmenistan that diversification in the choice of pipelines and foreign investors is the surest guarantee of Turkmenistan's independence, their self-proclaimed point of reference.

As for military issues, Washington should not rush to offer forces or seek bases, which in any case clashes with current policy. But it should make clear that it will look favorably upon the resumption of an

active Turkmen cooperation with the PfP program of NATO and facilitate such a return to the PfP program. Second, Washington should also make clear that if Turkmenistan, again, of its uncoerced free will, wishes to participate in the programs associated with Operation CASPIAN GUARD and help defend its own coastline against proliferation, smuggling, and terrorists, that it would be glad to help Ashgabat to the same extent that it helps Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan in this program. Internal security assistance, however, must be more strictly conditioned than has been the case in earlier examples in Central Asia lest we end up supporting a regime whose actions increase repression and likely instability as in Uzbekistan. The Rand Corporation's recent investigation of these programs suggests that without such strict monitoring and conditionality, their benefits are substantially diminished.[193]

Above all, U.S. policy should be unified and closely coordinated across disparate agencies, realistic about what can be attained in the immediate future, and aim to minimize losses and exclusion of our interests from consideration, rather than seeking to prevail. It is unlikely that our interests will triumph unless we are prepared to offer the multidimensional benefits that Moscow and its partners are ready, willing, and able to offer at once. But we should not let them simply walk away with Turkmenistan and let it be swallowed up in what will inevitably be a neo-colonial and backward sphere of influence which will constantly be menaced by the threat of internal violence due to the accumulated backwardness left over from Niyazov's policies. Neither can we ignore the threat to the global economy that would result from a Russian-led gas cartel. As Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher observed, the touchstone of our policy here should

not be tied to any one person or faction, but rather to progress in opening up Turkmenistan and making it a more stable place to live.[194]

However, we should have no illusions that making progress toward these goals will be easy or occur quickly. And the difficulty of resolving in a few years the acute internal tensions and pathologies accumulated over decades of Soviet rule and Niyazov's despotism cannot be underestimated. For Turkmenistan, recent history is a nightmare from which it is struggling to awake. But it will remain haunted by the dead weight of the past for a long time to come, even if it receives disinterested help from outside. As such impartiality is not likely, we should not succumb to illusions that we are not going to be attacked for our policies there or elsewhere in Central Asia or that we can do more than assist people who are painfully groping with few of the sources of support they need for both stability and democracy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To succeed in Turkmenistan, the U.S. Government must undertake those policy steps that will offer it the possibility of competing successfully with Moscow, Beijing, and Tehran. To do so requires that we do the following.

- First, the administration must ensure that it has the capacity to conduct a unified, multidimensional, and interagency policy in Turkmenistan and, for that matter, across Central Asia.
- It must also realistically assess what our goals for Turkmenistan are, specifically with regard to its remaining neutral or aligning with one or

another power.

- This assessment must also include an evaluation of the importance to Washington of the BTC and TAP or TAPI pipelines; the significance of any Caspian participation in U.S.-aided defense projects concerning the Caspian littoral; and critically the extent to which Turkmenistan will open access to U.S. investments in energy related fields and ultimately other industries.
- Especially in view of the recent Russo-Turkmen-Kazakh deals, Washington should make every effort to assist U.S. energy firms to explore in Turkmenistan, discover the additional gas that Berdymukhammedov believes is there, and work to facilitate decisions for alternative pipelines rather than those going strictly to Russia.
- In this context, it is also essential to identify those players who would be receptive to our interests and help them find their way into power and influence in Turkmenistan, while trying to provide for a balanced and stable arrangement that does not let the succession struggle degenerate into violence.
- It also is equally important that we encourage others to work with us or forge a line that commands support among such players as key European states, India, and IFIs.
- Similarly, the readiness to provide military assistance, but only as requested for the limited aims which we now have there, should be stressed along with the readiness to move forward on the TAP line and greater Central Asian projects outlined in Secretary Rice's statements and State Department documents.

- Specifically, this means that U.S. diplomatic objectives should work toward opening Turkmenistan to fewer police pressures, moves towards more stable administration with a truly functioning state apparatus that encompass steps towards greater control over the police and Ministry of Interior forces, and the opening up of the country toward foreign competition on an equal basis.
- U.S. policies ought to aim at reducing the economic and police pressure upon the population and at providing the kinds of social services and counternarcotics assistance that the new regime has called for.
- Key diplomatic and economic objectives also must include encouraging Turkmenistan's new rulers to consider favorably the possibility of joining the BTC pipeline and making progress towards the TAP line so that Ashgabat can maximize its commercial interests.
- Therefore, Washington should lose no opportunity to point out this harmony of interests.
- On the other hand, Washington should not adopt a position on the Caspian Sea's demarcation, especially one that opposes both Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. But since the Azeri and Kazakh regimes support the present proposal for division by coastal share, we should not oppose Turkmenistan's decision to support that proposal if it comes about. Continuing uncertainty only holds back investment in energy and in the greater Caspian area more generally. Moreover, stabilization of the Caspian along this line marks a major defeat for Iran. Indeed,

given current trends, Iran is the big loser in the Caspian since no major investment in pipelines or exploration in its share of the Caspian appears to be forthcoming.

- In regard to the TAP line, since the ADB strongly supports it, Washington should promote more support from the ADB and work to remove the political difficulties among India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan towards greater energy collaboration. This also means, of course, a comprehensive effort to stabilize Afghanistan internally and rebuff the growing tide of Taliban attacks there.
- But in Turkmenistan, Washington should also be providing economic and humanitarian assistance, all the while reminding the new rulers of Turkmenistan that diversification in the choice of pipelines and foreign investors is the surest guarantee of Turkmenistan's independence, their self-proclaimed point of reference.
- As for military issues, Washington should not rush to offer forces or seek bases, which in any case clashes with current policy. But it should make clear that it will look favorably upon the resumption of an active Turkmen cooperation with the PfP program of NATO and facilitate such a return to the PfP program.
- Second, Washington should also make clear that if Turkmenistan, again of its uncoerced free will, wishes to participate in the programs associated with Operation CASPIAN GUARD and help defend its own coastline against proliferation, smuggling, and terrorists, that it would be glad to help Ashgabat to the same extent that it helps

Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan in this program. Internal security assistance, however, must be more strictly conditioned than has been the case in earlier examples in Central Asia lest we end up supporting a regime whose actions increase repression and likely instability as in Uzbekistan.

- In crafting our policy toward Ashgabat, we must always remember that demands for major political reform prior to delivering on socio-economic reform will not advance any of our interests there. Turkmenistan will only listen to an American message when it believes America is a credible friend and will not listen to our political sermons beforehand. Toward that end, a long period of stability and gradually increasing prosperity is essential. Furthermore, the conditions that are necessary for democracy as Americans understand the term are utterly lacking in Turkmenistan. They must and can only be introduced from within, not from above or by force. So we must work with Turkmenistan, not for it or try to lecture to it. Policy should therefore aim at achieving what is realistically achievable in Ashgabat, not what is dreamt of in Washington, for there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of on the banks of the Potomac.

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